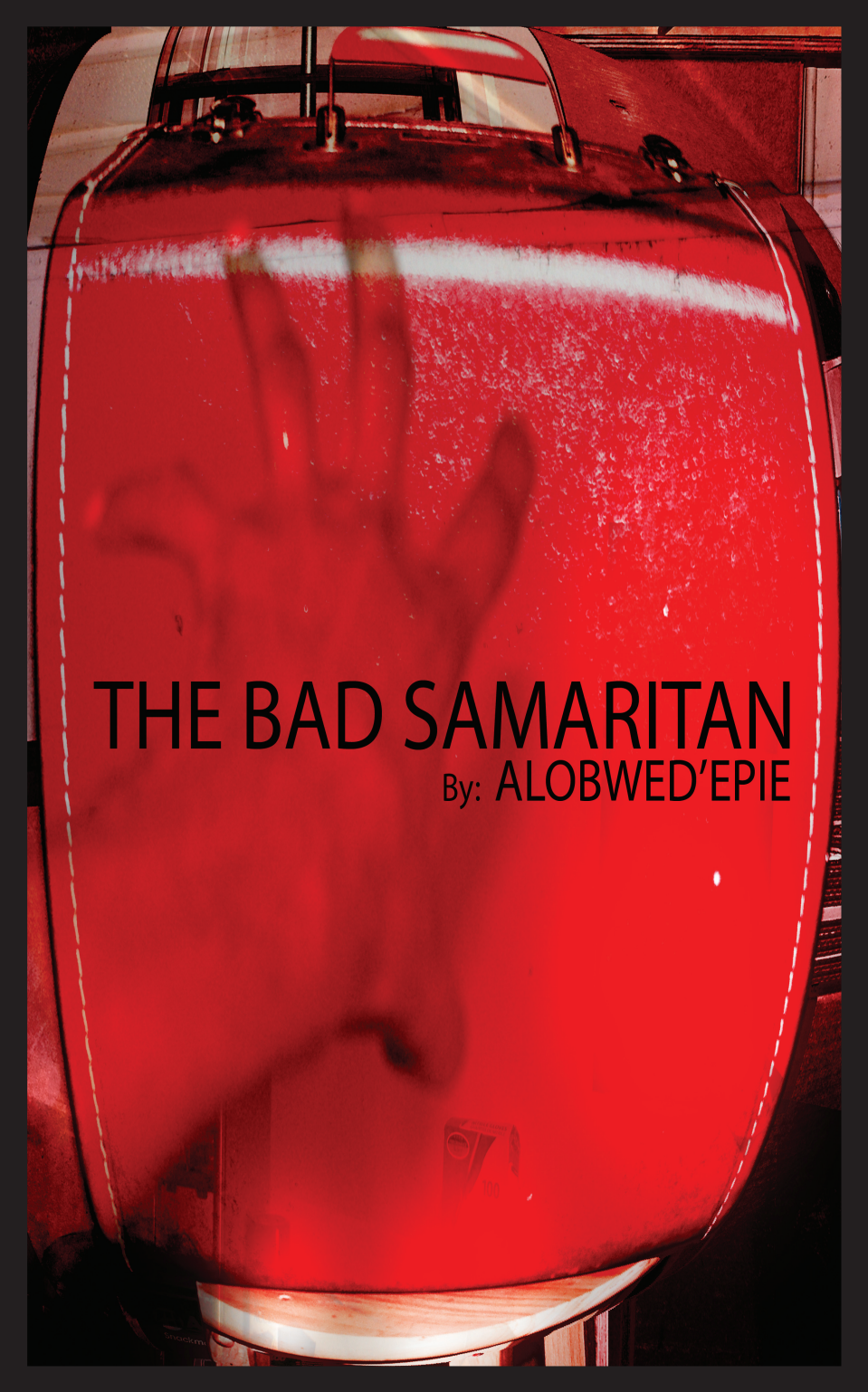


A red leather suitcase with white stitching is shown. A handprint is visible on the front of the suitcase. The suitcase is open, and the interior is visible. The text "THE BAD SAMARITAN" is written in large, bold, black letters across the middle of the suitcase. Below it, the text "By: ALOBWED'EPIE" is written in smaller, black letters.

THE BAD SAMARITAN

By: ALOBWED'EPIE

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The Bad Samaritan

Charles Alobwed'Epie



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Contents

Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	5
Chapter Three	11
Chapter Four	15
Chapter Five	23
Chapter Six	27
Chapter Seven	31
Chapter Eight	35
Chapter Nine	39
Chapter Ten	47
Chapter Eleven	51
Chapter Twelve	55
Chapter Thirteen	59
Chapter Fourteen	63
Chapter Fifteen	67
Chapter Sixteen	73
Chapter Seventeen	77
Chapter Eighteen	91
Chapter Nineteen	97
Chapter Twenty	103

Chapter Twenty One	109
Chapter Twenty Two	113
Chapter Twenty Three	117
Chapter Twenty Four	125
Chapter Twenty Five	129
Chapter Twenty Six	133
Chapter Twenty Seven	139
Chapter Twenty Eight	145
Chapter Twenty Nine	153
Chapter Thirty	157
Chapter Thirty One	159
Chapter Thirty Two	167
Chapter Thirty Three	173
Chapter Thirty Four	179

Chapter One

On 23rd November 2000, Esole received a letter from his daughter in London telling him she was coming home for a month's holiday and would like to stay with them. He was so stunned by the letter that he gave it to his wife to read and tell him what she thought about it.

"What are you surprised about? She just wants that we create space for her. Did you think she would come and embarrass us as people from the village do by dropping in as storm falls and not wind falls?" she asked.

"If that is what the letter means to you, it has rung a bell in me. My daughter is my daughter and there is always space for her in my house."

"Your brothers and your sisters are your brothers and your sisters and there is always space for them in your house whether they inform you of their coming or not," she retorted.

"OK, Ok. I don't want us to spit at each other."

"What is your programme this morning? I want you to accompany me to Express Union. She has sent money which she says she is going to use when she comes. She does not want to depend on us for feeding and recreation."

"And she sent the money to you?"

"Yes."

"OK, I shall take you to Express Union whenever you are ready."

They went to Express Union and got the money and as they were about to get into the car, Esole stretched his hand to get the money from his wife.

“You see, I don’t think our daughter would feel comfortable if she heard that her money was in your keeping. She would feel you would like to borrow it and play a cat and mouse game with it when you would be required to pay it back. In fact I promised I would put the money in my account in the Post Office Savings Bank (POSB). So take me to the bank.”

He took her to the POSB and after saving the money he dropped her at her jobsite. He returned to his office with a slight headache. Fortunately before untoward thoughts took the better of him, a friend came and their conversation made him forget his ordeal of the morning.

After work, several things crisscrossed his mind. He thought he would leave the reception of their daughter with his wife. She would have to create the space she and her daughter were asking for in the house, organize the parties and do a thousand other things a loving daughter would require in the course of a month’s holiday. He returned with a bumpy face, a face ravaged by anger and self reproach but feigned a smile at her when she came in bustling with delight that evening. She made several shuttles to the children’s rooms and guest room. Her brisk movements told it all. She was in a state of ecstasy. Several times, he tried to vent his disgust at what he thought was a usurpation of his right to organize the house as it should be, but held back for courtesy sake.

“I prefer to arrange the boy’s room. Come and see. It is smaller, dirtier and more manageable. Since we shall have to paint the room, we better take the one that is dirty. Secondly, the boys will be better managed sleeping in the parlour than the girls.”

Esole kept quiet as the storm in him reached gale level.

“Why are you so quiet? Are you not happy that the girl is coming home? Aren’t you happy that she has completed her Masters with distinction and she is coming for a holiday? You look withdrawn.”

“What do you want me to do? You have given tangible reasons why the boys’ room would be ideal. That’s OK. What next?”

“Tomorrow you will buy oil paint. The room should be painted well ahead of time. You know the smell of paint has to dissipate before she comes.”

“You can’t remember where they sell paint?”

“Is it women who buy paint? Furthermore will you expect me to do the painting? Am I wrong to say that you will buy paint?”

“Ok. Ok, I shall buy the paint. Oil paint is expensive. I don’t have the money now. She is due in two weeks. So, before then if I have money I shall buy the paint.”

“A ha! That is it. If I had given you that money you would have begun using it in preparing for the girl’s arrival and you would say you had spent it to prepare for her arrival.”

“And now that you have not given me the money I shall not prepare for her arrival?”

“You look tensed. There’s something uncanny in your voice.”

“Then you better leave me alone.”

“I can’t leave you alone because two weeks is a short time. We have to buy window blinds, in fact I fall short of saying that we have to paint the whole house with oil paint, buy a new set of furniture and decorate the outside – the lawns. You see, her friends and other very important guests will come to welcome her. What if a suitor comes along?!”

Such pattering worked on Esole’s nerves. He got up and strolled out. He went out for problem solving. He took two straight Gold Harps and as the liquor coursed through him warming every nerve in him, he thought things over more maturely and returned home more relaxed. When he got home his wife respected their code of conduct. He had warned her from day one of their marriage never to provoke or talk to him harshly when he was drunk. So, she left him alone, and he went to bed.

The next morning he was much more composed. He thought things over like a man and decided to help her in the best way he could, in preparing for the arrival of their daughter. He gave her money for window and door blinds and house flowers. He bought a new set of furniture and had the house renovated to receive an honourable guest.

As the days passed by, his wife became more and more excited. She clung to him like a teak, suggesting this, suggesting that. She said she would buy a pig from Bogbesi Agric Farms rather than buy pork in the market. This was because she doubted the way Meleks people fed the pigs they sold in the market. She promised sending for a goat from their village. She promised heaven and earth. Although he was tired of such vain talk he had no choice but to accept it in order to keep their relationship cordial before the arrival of their daughter. He never promised but did what he thought was necessary. And whenever he did something she did not expect, but which was necessary, she would praise and hug him all day long.

Two weeks were really very short for the preparation. In fact, if he did not take her advice their daughter would not have been able to use the room they had prepared for the first few days because of the smell of paint. For several days the faint smell of paint still hovered in the room and suffocated him whenever he went in for inspection. So, he left the door and windows permanently open for fresh air to dispel the scent.

Chapter Two

On the day of arrival, his wife got ready at 9.00 a.m. and told him they had to be early at the airport.

“The flight is expected at 6 p.m. You want us to go early to that jungle and do what there before the plane arrives? Have you ever been to that airport? There is nothing interesting there. There is nowhere one can refresh themselves there. The place is just a jungle. I have never seen an ugly airport like that. Airports are usually tourists’ attractions. But the designers of this one might never have been trained abroad. I know the Minister of Transport gave the contract to one of his primitive brothers.”

“Then it will be better for us to go at 4 p.m. That won’t be bad. I want to see the planes landing and taking off.”

“You will see more birds, kites and crows landing and taking off than planes. Furthermore, the airport is so unattractive that people get bored when an expected plane arrives only a few minutes late. Our daughter is coming by Ewawan Airways, a notoriously always out of schedule Airways. Its planes leave or arrive two or more hours late. The airport itself lacks basic facilities – toilets, television, seats and snack bars. Be unfortunate to wait for somebody there and the plane is late. Then will you get the hell of what I am saying. Women from adjacent villages capitalize on that. They bring beer and local food at the airport but because of face saving, the authorities don’t allow them to sell the food at the airport. The airport authorities have made some makeshifts for them well away from the airport where the women sell the things at exorbitant prices. And that is it.”

“Aren’t you exaggerating? Do you mean the management of the airport has never been abroad and received training on how airports are run? No doubt people call you an opposition.”

“You have called me one. Your mouth has said it in front of me. Thank you. But let me warn you, our situation is like mating dogs – neither the male nor the female likes the hook.”

“Shit. Immoral. Not befitting. Rubbish.”

“Fine. When I shall be laughing you will be crying.”

Esole took offence at his wife’s insolence and decided to punish her. Since she was ready, he asked her to enter the car and they drove off to the airport. It was 1 p.m. He drove slowly pretending to do sightseeing. When they got to the last village about five kilometres to the airport, he stopped at a bar and they had two bottles of beer each. At 4.30 p.m. they left for the airport and arrived there in a few minutes. Before long, his wife wanted to ease herself. He took her to the toilet section down, down the basement. All the doors of the toilets were nailed shut. Only a carpenter could wrench them open. That measure was taken perhaps because desperate passengers had forced the doors open when they were conventionally locked. His wife suppressed a scream, blocking her mouth and nostrils firmly with her left hand. She dragged him by the hand and indicated that they dash out of the place. The toilets emitted pungent smell. Once they were out of the place, she followed her nose to the nearest bush to ease herself. He followed her to give her the cover necessary in such places. When she came back she cursed the management of the airport, the Minister of Transport and thought that if the Head of State knew about the state of our International Airport, he would replace the Minister and dismiss the General Manager of the airport. Esole kept quiet as he thanked God for the success of his first lesson.

They moved back to the terminal building and started pacing the hall to avoid standing on the same spot for long. They did not make two rounds when his wife complained of her toes hurting in her high heel shoes. From the way she moved he thought she had already developed blisters. To avoid worsening the situation, he took her to the virtually abandoned restaurant and made her sit down on a chair that was peeling like the bark of a tree. To make her feel at home, he ordered for a sweet drink for her.

"We have only Coca cola in stock," the restaurant assistant said and brought a small bottle of Coke. He opened it without consent of the wife, poured it into a glass and placed it in front of her. She sat down heavily in pains. Her toes might have been hurting much more than he thought. He regretted for not taking her to the restaurant earlier. The restaurant was in fact, a facility meant for white passengers and the plunderers of the economy of Ewawa.

"You said there were no restaurants in this airport. Now you bring me to a restaurant after my toes have developed blisters."

"I'm sorry madam. But see, the place is empty. It is said that the Director of the airport ordered new equipment and furniture worth hundreds of millions of francs for the restaurant. When the things arrived, he exchanged them with the old equipment and furniture he had in his personal hotel restaurant. A commission of inquiry was set up immediately. It is three years since, yet there are no results. See how old the seats and tables of this restaurant are. No passengers come here to eat and drink under these conditions. Look at the kitchen, old equipment. Do you see the risk of fire consuming this place? Rusty stoves, cracked plates and glasses, cracked floor, unpainted walls, no air conditioning."

"Thank you my toes are eased up."

"While you sip your Coke let me pace the reception hall. I may meet a friend to help in clearing the luggage of our daughter. I have some customs friends here. I may be lucky to meet one of them."

“Don’t keep long. This place is not ideal. No television. Nothing is attractive. Don’t be long. Pay before you leave. I may decide to come down.”

Esole asked the assistant to bring the bill. He brought it in an old saucer. Esole read it and put FCFA2000 note in the saucer. The assistant brought the change and Esole took it, left the bill in the saucer and went off. When he returned, he met his wife quarrelling with the assistant on the price of the Coke – FCFA 1,500.

“I have brought bad news. Our daughter’s plane is due at 8.15 p.m. All planes scheduled for landing in Dande today have been rescheduled because the Presidential couple will be returning from a four months holiday in Switzerland.”

“What has a Presidential couple got to do with running an international airport? International airports are commercial institutions. They survive on making profit. If each Presidential return means turning away international flights how much money would be lost?”

“You are sounding opposition. Don’t get into my shoes.”

“Into your shoes? How much did you pay for a small Coke? If thousands of passengers don’t use that facility, how much money is the airport management losing per day?”

“That is nobody’s business. The loss is the nation’s loss and what belongs to all belongs to none.”

“What are you saying? When a ship capsizes who dies? Individuals die and the ship too dies when it sinks.”

“You are right but we need not bother about that now. Let’s go to the makeshift where we can have some fun. I know the women are bustling with excitement now. They are usually happy when planes come or leave late. The weary passengers and visitors crowd the makeshifts because there is no other choice and because the prices are affordable and there is much gossip about this government.”

They moved slowly to the place and to their surprise, there were more people there than at the terminal. Esole ordered for two bottles of beer. His wife wanted to know

the price before drinking. When she was told that a bottle of Turborg cost FCFA 600 and a small bottle of Coke FCFA 300, she swore she would never drink at the airport terminal restaurant again. They sat down and as they drank, they made friends. They chatted on diverse issues. At the corner was a sullen cranky old woman who seemed to bear the world a grudge.

“Madam,” Esole addressed her, trying to take her out of her wistful world. “Why are you so pensive? Take a beer and drink with us.”

She loosened up and got a beer from her fridge. She opened it, raised it for cheers, and thanked him in her native language. She gulped two straight mouthfuls, belched and sat down to recompose herself. Her lips trembled as if she had something to say. Esole moved close to her and put his hand on her shoulders feigning a kiss. His wife smiled at the joke. She pointed at her and also smiled.

“Why have you been so sad, anything wrong?” Esole asked.

“Several, several, several things wrong. You see that place, that place, newly scraped. I have worked there for several years to flatten it and build a sizeable shed where I thought I would employ my widowed daughter to sell bush meat pepper soup. Two weeks ago, the General Manager of the airport came and seized it from me. See, he has started building a modern restaurant there. You see in the far left, the Minister of Finance seized that piece of land from an epileptic who had taken years to level the place so as to build a good shed for his sister who is his breadwinner. I don’t know what the big people want us to do. They want to squeeze and drive us even from our homes.”

“But these are your people. Don’t you belong to the ruling clans? Aren’t you people of this region?” Esole asked.

“We are, but do our sons know that? There, there above the hill was my father’s house. Because of its imposing nature, the Minister of Territorial Administration has seized

it. He says it is government land and we must leave. He gave each of us FCFA 2,000,000 and asked us to look for land somewhere else. My two brothers and three sisters got FCFA 10,000,000. That is all. Can two million francs buy land and build a house for each of us? Where shall we keep our children? What about our parents' graves?"

"Your best bet is to write to the Head of State. Write to the President. Tell him that your brothers who are Ministers are seizing your land and are driving you out of your God-given heritage. You will see. He will react," Esole advised.

"If we write to him about his Ministers, to whom shall we write about he himself? He has seized more of our land than the Ministers put together."

"Our people say 'If a wound goes beyond the bone then it is no longer a wound'. If your situation goes beyond the Presidency, then it is no longer a human problem," Esole responded and stretched himself to go.

It was now 7.30 p.m. Mrs. Esole was itchy to return to the terminal where she expected to watch the landing of their daughter's plane. The Presidential couple had landed around 6.30 p.m. under very heavy security. There were soldiers everywhere in the bushes, and even around the makeshifts. The cranky lady eyed them with flaming scorn. But that was all she could do. For the first time, the Esoles discovered that even people of the ruling clans did not like their rulers.

Chapter Three

Esole and his wife left for the terminal when the soldier guarding the makeshift area had gone. To his wife's disappointment, she discovered that unlike other airports where visitors climbed to the roof to have a panoramic view of the runway and thus admire the landing and taking off of planes, the Ewawa white elephant had no access to the roof. So, they were confined to the reception hall and only heard planes land and take off. That aspect of the essence and beauty of an airport is removed from this so called International Airport. As such, at 8.15, they missed the graceful landing of their daughter's plane. Mrs. Esole was particularly hurt. Her rating of Ewawa sank to the lowest level.

When their daughter saw them, she jumped at her father and hugged him tenderly. Then she drained every emotion on her mother. It was wonderful to welcome home a diligent scholar, their daughter. She was one of the lucky few who went abroad on scholarship. They waited for her luggage. The luggage conveyors rolled in valise after valise. For almost one hour their daughter's valise did not surface. At last the girl recognized a valise.

"I think that is it," she said and moved on to take it. It was saggy. She dragged it from the conveyors. Some of its contents fell out – bottles of rubbing oil and hair creams. The bag had been vandalized, torn through along the zip line with a sharp knife. Esole went red with anger and dashed to see the authorities. They told him to make a written protest stating what he thought had been stolen. He was not ready for that. So, he dragged the bag to the customs

check desk and showed them that the bag had been broken into and things stolen. He refused to declare the content of what remained and insisted that he had to carry the bag out, check its content before declaring what had been stolen. The customs officer refused his request. He insisted that Esole should open the bag and declare what was remaining at the check desk. Esole refused and they picked up a quarrel. Although his daughter pleaded with him to do as the officer wanted, he was adamant.

"Shit," he insulted and said he did not see any reason why he should be haunted by the wraith of this regime at every turn of his life. "Stupid," he insulted again and said he won't give himself up to be victimized by the kleptomania in place.

"Look, when a plane lands, workers have very little time to unload its cargo from the cargo bay to the trolleys which carry the things to the terminal. At the terminal, other workers carry the cargo from the trolleys to the luggage conveyors. When do they have time to unzip or cut through the bags? Isn't this a tribal conspiracy to discomfort people of the non-ruling clans? Who are labourers at the airport? Isn't it boys and girls from the ruling clans?" he asked almost shouting.

"Daddy," the girl addressed her father. "We need not waste time here. Open the bag and let the customs officer do what she wants to do with it."

As Esole was about to open the bag, a customs friend came, saw him and asked what the matter was. He explained and his friend signalled the girl to allow him go with what remained in the bag. Can you imagine the volcano in him? They drove home like birds on the wing, silent, sullen, devastated, shamefaced. It was 12.14 a.m. when he horned at their gate. Friends and well wishers who had come to welcome their loving daughter had gone. The envisaged party could not hold and that meant that all the food they had prepared to welcome their daughter would be overnight food and who eats that?

Their daughter took things lightly. She said nothing of importance had been stolen. She had expected that to happen. It was not the first time it had happened to her at that airport. So, she had packed her bag to frustrate the thieves. She had a smaller valise containing valuable things put in the bigger valise and around it she had packed worthless and even very dangerous oils. They were to protect the small valise. "Once the thieves felt the oils as they sent their hands into the valise, they took what they could within the time they had for the operation. "But let me tell you, any person who rubs one of those oils will have her skin peel off. They are very corrosive drugs laced with perfume."

A nondescript sensation ran through Esole's spine after listening to his daughter. He was split between praising her and condemning her for being inhuman. After thinking things over, he thought she deserved more praise than condemnation. Ewawa was rotten. There was no saint. Since the three salary cuts and the institutionalization of kleptocracy, every Ewawan even babies were thieves. For one thing, the government cut salaries not because it was a measure to fight economic crises, but a measure to hoard funds for Ministers and the top brass of our country to embezzle. Once there is a flood upstream, downstream must be contaminated. And that is it. Go to the market. See what measures the traders use. No two traders have the same measures for the same commodity. See the scales, see the way the butcher cuts meat, see the type of meat he cuts for a customer, look at the school boy selling groundnuts, see his measure, it has been beaten and flattened beyond recognition and after cheating the customer in measuring the groundnut, he comes with a devils face and smiles with what he calls dash (gift).

Although there were few people to receive their daughter, they had good times. They conversed on a number of things. Their daughter told them about her performance at the University and the prospects she had. She talked of having

turned down marriage proposed by her white supervisor. She said she wanted to concentrate on her studies and obtain a PhD before thinking of marriage. More importantly she thought she would return to Ewawa, work for a year or two before getting married to an Ewawan. The people hailed her and promised giving her the support she needed. It was already morning. The last visitor had left. Esole showed her, her room and she exclaimed with delight, "Daddy, you have taste". Her mother reacted, "Mommy, you have taste". And they went to bed happily though late.

Chapter Four

After two weeks with them, their daughter wanted to visit her grandparents in the village. She told her mother she would need some money to buy local gifts like tea, sugar, fish, rice, bread, soap etc. for them. Those were image boosting things lucky grandparents shared to their relatives with pride. The girl needed FCFA 500,000.

“Isn’t that too much money? How long will you be there? I think FCFA 200,000 or FCFA 300,000 will be OK. You are not going for any fanfare, are you?” her mother asked.

“I want to buy things for FCFA 150,000, give my granddad FCFA 100,000, my grand-mom, FCFA 50,000, my aunt FCFA 25,000. And the rest of the money will cater for other things. So, it is not too much.”

“OK, I’ll go to the bank tomorrow.”

The next day, Madame Esole told her husband to take her to the Post Office Savings Bank. She said she did not want to go there alone because the amount was heavy. It was unwise for a woman to take a taxi with that amount of money on her. He joyfully took her to the POSB. They arrived at about 10.15 a.m. The doors were still shut. By 11.15, he told his wife he would go to the office open the door for the cleaner, then come back for her. She accepted and he went. After opening the door, he went back to the bank. He met his wife still standing at the same spot.

“You have not gone in yet? What are they telling you?”

“Nobody has cared to tell us anything. We see people moving in the bank. They see us standing here but they haven’t got the courtesy to tell us whether there is a public holiday or not.”

"And how long shall you stand here? I have to go. I can't wait indefinitely. If you wait for another hour, go back. Perhaps the bank will open tomorrow."

"Dione has already sent word that she would be in the village in two days. If I don't get the money today, when will she buy the things she is talking about?"

"She can postpone the journey. If the bank does not open she will have no choice. All normal banks have opened. It may be one of the top brass in this bank is dead. Even so, the bank cannot cancel its operations without informing its customers. There should be something more serious, or has the disease of commercial banks extended to this government institution for the poor?"

"I shall return and go and get money from our thrift and loan group at 5%. I have no choice. That girl has to go on schedule. You see, she has her prestige to protect."

"OK, that's a better option."

Mr. and Mrs. Esole left the bank with misgivings.

"I think the bank has followed the footprints of other banks in Ewawa. It has gone bankrupt."

How can that be? Won't that be too abrupt? No warning signs? The bank was in full operation on Friday. How could it stop abruptly on Monday? Furthermore it was not a commercial bank that took risks of lending out money to untrustworthy businessmen. It was a government owned bank for mostly hawkers and the low income earners."

"I know, but though its board of Directors is chaired by the Minister of Post and Telecommunication, financial institutions in Ewawa are unpredictable. Agreed, the Minister is a shrewd self-respecting young man who spites the old school for acts of embezzlement of public funds."

Since in Ewawa anything can happen, the Esoles got home really shattered. Mrs. Esole borrowed money from her thrift and loan group at 10% while her money was blocked in the bank at no percent. In the evening when their daughter returned from visiting some friends, her half

jubilant half mourning mother gave her the FCFA 500,000 without telling her the ordeal she had gone through in getting the money.

On the appointed day, Dione left for the village. While she was away, her mother kept going to the bank for the money. In fact she thought she would withdraw all the money in her account whenever the bank opened its gates. But the more she went to the bank, the more she became confused and frustrated. Rumour-mongers told a thousand stories about the POSB. Some said it had been taken over by a Canadian Consortium and was just being reorganized. They said it was to be developed into the farmers' bank and would have branches in market villages within the national territory. Loans at give-away interest would be given to farmers as a means of fighting poverty. Those whose money was being blocked at the moment would benefit enormously from interest that would be calculated on the basis of shareholding. With that, Mrs. Esole came in sometimes smiling if the rumour was in her favour, or sullen if it was not. One day, she came back extremely frightened. Esole asked her why she looked that sick.

"You are enjoying yourself while I am suffering. That child bears your family name not mine. Ever since she came here I am the only one who is concerned with her stay and return. The money matter means nothing to you."

"What did you expect me to do which I have not done?"

"You have not been assisting at all in trying to get the money from the bank. There are situations in which a man's presence is necessary. But in this, you are totally absent. See, a military man whose mother-in-law had died, and who had been coming to the bank to no avail to withdraw money and prepare to take the corpse home, went mad when a day before the removal of the corpse from the mortuary, he came and still found the gates locked. He tied a chain to the gate, tied it to his military jeep and tore down the gate. He then went for the corpse and laid it in front of the bank. Then he

sat on the coffin with a loaded gun and threatened the authorities that he would bury the corpse there if they did not give him money. It took twenty other armed military men to convince him to withdraw from the place. In leaving the place, they gave him money. A man should be decided in situations that you have abandoned to me.”

“Woman, you sound opposition. What man signed death? A military man. And he succeeded. He succeeded because he was a military man. And that is it. Our country is under a military regime disguised as a democracy. What the military says is what happens. The military condones the ills of the government and the government condones the ills of the military. And that is it. Because our politicians have the protection of the military they can do and undo and vice versa. So, can you show the military man in me? I am a teacher and not a military man.”

“That is no excuse why you have left the ordeal to me. We have to go to the bank tomorrow and stay there till they tell us what is wrong. You must stand up to the task like a man.”

The next day the couple left for the bank and were told that the bank would start serving people the following day. The following day they went there. Mrs. Esole presented a cheque of FCFA 2,000,000. The counter boy reduced it to FCFA 20,000. He told them the bank could pay only that amount that day. Mrs. Esole screamed. Other customers were more violent. They started throwing stones. Esole advised his wife to leave the scene. Sooner or later, the management would send for police intervention and the police who were trigger happy, would use maximum force to quell the incident. They left the place immediately. They were not well away when they heard gunshots and saw teargas canisters flying in the air. In the evening, foreign media reported ten deaths but Ewawa media talked of one wounded.

Dione was in the village for eight days. Upon her return, she went and booked her return flight without telling her parents. It was easy. She had a return ticket and she simply went to confirm her flight. When she returned, she told her mother she needed FCFA 1,500,000 to buy assorted things she would sell in Europe. She wanted to buy eru, cray fish, bonga, coverpot, egusi, njangsang, and other spices not found in Europe. She would dry them in a special way and package them in a way that would prevent them from going bad. She would then send them as unaccompanied luggage. She thought she would make more than four times profit on the things. That would help her cope with her needs before she received her PhD stipend.

Mrs. Esole withered with that demand. She called Esole out of ear shot and pleaded with him to borrow FCFA 2,000,000 from his thrift and loan group since their interest was only 2%.

"I can't borrow money from our group anymore. I have borrowed twice more than my savings. That is not allowed. I had to borrow that much because our last son had to enter Sasse College and you know how expensive those private schools are."

"What do we do then?"

"Tell our daughter the truth. Tell her she can't buy the things she needs because the money she sent is stuck in the bank."

"Did you hear the purpose of the things? If she does not buy them how will she live in that strange land? We shouldn't create a situation that would send her into harlotry. You must do something and stop being nonchalant about things that concern you, things which you have abandoned to your wife."

"OK, I shall borrow FCFA 1,500,000. That's all I can borrow."

In the evening Esole gave her the money and she called her daughter and told her the truth about the financial situation of Ewawa. Money in the banks was as unsafe as money at home. If thieves knew one had money at home they would come and kill you and get the money. If one put money in the bank, those who own the bank swindled it with impunity. And that was it.

Dione swallowed the bitter pill with dignity. She did not reproach her mother. She simply kept quiet. But from every indication, her stay with them had slumped into an anticlimax. She bought a few things, prepared them as she had wanted and took them along on the day of her departure. On that day, as they left for the airport she bought a *Jeune Afrique Economie* and read it as they drove on to the airport. Her mother was not comfortable with that. She wanted a loving and departing daughter to converse with her parents. Converse on what? Converse on dashed hopes? Converse on a ruined holiday? Even Mrs. Esole could not break the silence. And so they drove on like a funerary procession. When they got to the airport, Dione sighed, showed her father the magazine and asked whether he had read it.

"We don't read news papers, not to talk of magazines in Ewawa. They are too expensive. Those who have time read the headlines at the kiosks and that is all."

"See this magazine, all the big names of our country are listed here as embezzlers of public funds. These are the very people teachers spend hours upon hours teaching our children are the icons of our nation. And of course our children spend sleepless nights memorizing their names in order to pass examinations questions set about them. These are the very people who stand on grandstands on our National Days leading the population in singing the National Anthem and receiving military honours. These are the people our children are taught to emulate. These are the very people who represent our country at international conferences and

present it as a poor Third World Country needing foreign aid. These are the people into whose hands the foreign aid is given to manage. These are the supposed catalysts of our society. How will the children feel if they read this magazine? How will orphans feel if they knew that these are the people who have made their lot unimaginably disgusting? No doubt most of my colleagues say they will never come home again.”

Esole felt the bite of what his daughter meant. He was dumbfounded. His wife was mute. In that silence, they unloaded Dione’s luggage and weighed it in. Shamefaced, Mrs. Esole’s lips trembled. She tried to talk but she had nothing to talk about. If she were to talk, she would have apologized for what had happened. Dione’s countenance was very betraying. She was with them physically but distant in spirit. Mrs. Esole and her husband were guilty, devastated, shamefaced, helpless, and hopeless. He thought their daughter had realized the inferno they were going through and would adjust but she was adamant. By the grace of God their ordeal wasn’t long. The plane was punctual and shortly, Dione came forth to hug them. She feigned a smile, hugged her mother twice, gave her father a handshake and entered the departure lounge and without turning to wave them goodbye, disappeared into the departing crowd and that was it. She left them in the mist of what the country had done to them. She left them with unforgettable bleeding hearts. Dione left her parents as if she had relieved herself of a great burden. It hurt to think of that separation. Really, it hurt.

Chapter Five

Dione's departure confounded her parents. Their hard earned lives were at their lowest ebb. For three days Mrs. Esole did not eat. For three days the couple waited for their daughter to phone that she had arrived safely. For three days they listened to the radio to hear of a plane crash. For three days they heard nothing. And so, like a cow with a hunchback, they bore the hump of their daughter's visit to Ewawa. They had debts to pay – debts on interest, interest that grew like fertilized crops. The debts coupled with the upkeep of children in school were heavy, very heavy on them. So, they had to device ways of paying sizeable chunks of the debt every month to reduce the interest. And while they did that, Ministers and their likes in this kleptocracy squandered hundreds of millions of taxpayers' money on trivialities.

Mrs. Esole decided to punctuate her work with doughnut making. And for the first time since their marriage her husband was bound to bear the inconvenience of the scent of smoke on a darling wife. She would get up in the night and start working on the dough. Then early in the morning she would fry the nuts. Sometimes, she fried the doughnuts to sell to late night club goers. If his wife did doughnuts, she was doing them for her 5% interest debt of FCFA 1,500,000. Esole had to do something also for his. He decided to do part-time teaching in the numerous unapproved secondary schools in Dande. To do that effectively, he had to reduce his commitment to his principal job. He was not alone in this. Most teachers had reduced their commitment to work and taken onto part-time teaching

and other extra-income generating activities. Nobody cared whether work was well done or not. All that was necessary was to once in awhile show up at the jobsite. Three months into that, Esole broke his debt by a quarter. His wife had long broken hers by half and realized that the doughnut-making women were not a negligible force in the nation's economy. Esole and his wife were gradually getting out of a difficult situation and were beginning to be happy once more.

Then on the 10th November 2005, they received an unexpected invitation from their daughter. The first correspondence since she left them. She was inviting them to London to attend her wedding to a Whiteman, her former supervisor. Esole's hair stood on end. His mouth got dry. Sweat, boiling hot oozed all over his body. His wife did not scream. She did not condemn the move. She tended to be neutral. Her countenance indicated nothing strange.

The wedding was scheduled for 10th December, at the heart of winter. They were instructed to come light because their winter clothing had been bought. The invitation contained two return tickets and good sterling. Mrs. Esole and her husband shuttled the items between them. He knew she admired them. Time and again, she smarted glances at him to see his reaction.

"Can one prepare for a loving daughter's wedding for a month?" she asked to break the silence.

"Why not? A day is sufficient if there is money," Esole responded with seething pain in his heart.

"But this is money. She will need eru, bitter leaf, egusi, esange, and other things she did not take along last time."

"Which last time? Esole asked his voice edged with anger."

"When she last came here," she responded conceitedly.

Such conversation did not please Esole. He walked out and went to a bar. After emptying two bottles of Gold Harp, he returned to his house and slept.

The next morning, his wife started nagging saying he had abandoned her with the invitation and money.

“Look Joe, even if our daughter’s decision to marry a white does not please you, you shouldn’t just abandon everything to me. Do you want me to go and put the money in my POSB account?”

“Perhaps you don’t understand the significance of the money. The money is meant to help us pay the debts we incurred. It is not money for us to carry along or save in a bank account.”

“Yes that is it. That is it. That is what it is meant for. But who has to keep it – a woman or a man? Suppose as you went drinking last night thieves had broken in and seized it from me, what would you have done?”

“That money is less than two million francs. Do you say you can’t handle two million francs today?”

“A ha! You have struck at the corp. of the problem. You have scraped old scars.”

“Old scars? What is old in the matter and what is new?”

“I know you bear me a grudge. I don’t think I made a mistake in carrying out our daughter’s instructions not to give her holiday money to you. She instructed me not to give it to you. I simply followed her instructions. I know that is why you abandoned the ordeal of trying to get it from the POSB with me.”

“That is being ungrateful. What do you mean? I paid FCFA 1,500,000 of that money. I don’t even know the exact amount. I did not even know it was heavy until your daughter started asking for large chunks of it. And you have the guts to say I abandoned you with the ordeal?”

“We need not split knobbly wood. Please if there was a mistake, let’s forgive and forget. Let’s forge ahead. See, that mishap might have brought us this blessing.”

“What blessing?” Esole asked and fixed a stabbing gaze at his wife.

“Our being part of a larger world. Our having prospects of going abroad. Our planting seeds of prosperity abroad. Our leaving Ewawa for good.”

“OK. OK. Please can you leave me alone?”

“Let’s count the money and go and exchange it.”

“There is no need counting it. The amount is written. And whites don’t make mistakes. Or do yours? So let’s go and exchange it.”

The couple went to Baskoteri and exchanged the money in the black market. The exchange was good, by far better than what they would have had at the bank. Mrs. Esole repaid her debt and Mr. Esole asked her to use the rest of the money in preparing for her trip to Britain. He told her he was too sensitive to cold and December was not the best month to go to Europe for those allergic to cold. She understood his plight. He feigned cordiality until she left on 4th December.

Chapter Six

The payment of loans imposed on Esole's family by a voracious regime, the 'loss' of his daughter Dione (whom he had named after his mother) as the consequence of that rapaciousness, caused him to develop high blood. One day, he was rushed to hospital. When he was identified, the Doctor of the emergency ward abandoned what he was doing and came to him.

"Professor, what is wrong with you people at the university? You all want to die the same day? What is the cause of the high blood syndrome at the university? You are not obese, you are not diabetic, you are not poor at least you can manage a square meal a day. Your treatment is self composure. Relax. Beat your worries and you are well."

That talk soothed Esole. He stood up and returned home without treatment. But then, the thought of his daughter had to be contained. December had come and gone and perhaps his daughter was married. Perhaps his wife had sent him the wedding pictures. He had refused going for his mails to avoid the reality. Several things crisscrossed his mind. He thought of taking advantage of a bad situation. Why shouldn't he capitalize on his daughter's wedding to a Whiteman? He was a renowned Professor, specialized in Globalization and Endangered Cultures. That would sell in Europe. His son-in-law himself a Professor, would help get a befitting teaching job for him, a job that would pay a hundred fold the chicken feed they were paid here. The Doctor had advised against worries. He was worried. Nothing could remove the worries. He was worried. But he

had to fight against the worries and the option was to swallow his pride and ask his son-in-law, a Whiteman, to look for a teaching job for him in any university.

He went for his mail at once. As predicted, his mail box was full of letters from Britain. He could decipher the content of each envelope from its size and hardness. The hard ones were of course wedding pictures. The soft ones were letters. He took the letters and read them. His daughter expressed her disappointment at his absence at her wedding. She said, all precaution had been taken for his safety and there was no reason why he stayed behind. His wife was unhappy with his silence. His son-in-law was anxious to seeing him one day. All in all, his family abroad was anxious to see him. His wife did not sound as if she would return. So, he would be welcomed in Britain and since all precaution would be taken for his safety, he would join his family in Britain.

To go to Britain, he had to go to the village to set order in his extended family before his envisaged long absence. When he reached Lebmot, the Sub-Divisional Head Quarters, he found the place in chaos. The Parliamentarian for the area had messed himself up and was so unpopular that he was very vulnerable with regard to the oncoming elections. He had taken the contract to repair roads, culverts and bridges of the area and instead of doing that, he had misappropriated the funds and had made no repairs. Thus, the area was completely cut off from the rest of the country in the rainy season. The population went mad with writing petitions to the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO), Governor and the Minister of Territorial Administration. Even children advocated for a change. The Mayor of the area was also in a mess. It was alleged he had done horrible things against his people. He was accused of murdering the night watch man of the council and using his private parts in concocting talismans in order to win elections. The population wanted him out.

As Esole sat down in a bar with a friend for a drink, he heard people discussing the two men insistently. The population needed well educated persons to occupy the two posts. There was no doubt. The two men had to go.

"Doctor," one of them called him. "Our people say, 'He who has long nails does not die of yaws'. Are we being deceived that we have long nails in people like you? Why can't you come and wipe our tears? Are you not fit to be a Parliamentarian? What do you gain in teaching which you haven't gained for the thirty years you have taught so far?"

Esole's mind convulsed. He sat still. Bile rose into his mouth. He had never thought of doing politics. He sipped his beer and promised the man he would respond later.

"What do you mean by later? Are you a monkey that leaves its heart on a tree? If you have left yours, go for it. *A mue* is that not what we have said?" he asked the people in the bar. The people in one accord chorused, "That is what we have said. Let him wet the floor."

Although Esole bought a crate of beer for them, he did not put much spirit in what they were expecting. In fact the beer was a face-saving thing. The people believe that people who work in Dande are rich and must be generous. After drinking with his friend, he bought things for the village and at five fifteen, left. He got home, tidied up what he thought needed attention and after two days he returned. He had a brief stop at Lebmot to see his mother-in-law and tell her he was about to join her daughter in Britain. Once the population heard that he was around, they came. They came in their numbers.

"Honourable," they addressed him. "We have come to tell you that we are not joking. Go and prepare yourself for the oncoming elections. It would be a mere formality. You are elected. The gods of Pekuguba Mountains have chosen you."

That pattering irritated and unnerved him as it went on and on. At a certain point, he was about blowing up his top when his village man stepped forth and convinced him that the people meant business. He said the population was with him and encouraged him to stand for the elections. As he left for Dande, he was split between pursuing his ambition of going to Britain and staying in Ewawa to contest the elections. Fortunately he had not told his mother in-law about his intention to join his wife in Britain. So, he was free to choose what appealed to him more.

Chapter Seven

The primary reasons behind his wanting to go to Britain were, living in an environment of peace, seeing men and women of conscience, earning a good salary and forgetting about the death sentence living in Ewawa had imposed on him. But for every coin, there are two sides. Moving a boulder could lead to chipping off significant chunks – chunks that would have been preserved if the boulder were left in place. Esole was a boulder. Going to Britain could be devastating at several fronts. His extended family needed guidance at close proximity. He had to ensure that he secured his pension with the government. So why not settle for politics? Victory was at the corner. The under bellies of the two political leaders in his area were exposed. They were easy preys. “I will contest the elections,” he said to himself and set himself to work.

He sent word to Lebmot that he would stand for the elections. The Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) was particularly happy that a man of substance had opted to challenge the status quo in his Sub-Division. He had been in very bad working relations with the two incumbent. If he got some constructive fellow, he would leave a mark of development in the place. So he sent word that Esole should see him at home when he next came to Lebmot.

Esole had to do certain gymnastics, choose a political party, register for the elections, present his candidature to the public, organize campaign teams, break up the Sub-Division into campaign units, and ensure security for each unit. He couldn’t do these things out of Lebmot. He had to

be present in Lebmot. When he got there, he went to the SDO's house. He welcomed him, made him sit down and brought a bottle of whisky. As they drank, he said he had heard Esole wanted to contest elections in his area of jurisdiction. Esole confirmed. The SDO said he was happy that those of them on whom the population could rely were now getting conscious that several things were getting wrong in the Sub-Division. He said Esole should be ready for a big fight because though the two incumbent were hated they had the means of buying their way through. He added that the Mayor was not an easy man. He shuttled between Ojebu Ode in Nigeria and the eastern regions of Ewawa to work out victory with *marabouts*. He had misappropriated hundreds of millions of francs from the council coffers to that effect. Furthermore, the fact that for an-on-the-spot loaf of bread the people of Lebmot readily sell their birth rights, the Mayor would use the power of his loot to lure them back into his camp. So, it won't be an easy task.

Esole thanked the SDO for his advice and left to meet the people in town. On his way, he compared the SDO's frank advice and the people's emotional wrangling. Both were useful. The people voted, the SDO didn't. If he took the middle course, especially if he told them the truth about the politico-economic and moral mess of Ewawa, the embezzlement of public funds, the three times cut in salaries, the fall in cocoa and coffee prices, the high cost of living, the poor state of roads, the inability of parents to educate their children, they would surely go in for him and not for those who told them lies that Ewawa was waxing on well. "The voice of the people would speak," he said to himself as the rays of confidence radiated in him.

In the evening, he invited a few prominent people he thought could be his advisers – people who had been hurt by the administration in one way or another. They had to lay out modalities and strategies for the job ahead. They

had to choose a political party – the truth-speaking party that would deliver the people from years of exploitation and deceit. They had to decide on which of the two positions he would contest the elections – Parliamentary or Mayoral. They x-rayed all political parties. They studied old and new manifestoes of each party. For the past thirty years only the Ewawa Party for Advanced Democracy (EPAD) had been in power. So only the EPAD manifesto could be put to question. They scrutinized it and found that it had never been fulfilled at any stage of the existence of the party. The fight would therefore be against the EPAD and not against the non-consequential mushroom parties that carried vain banners on national days. The EPAD was much more vulnerable than any other party.

In spite of that, some of Esole's advisers were unyielding in suggesting that he should stand for the ruling party. If he stood for the party, victory would be a given. They should go in for a win and not for a loss. The debate on which party he would choose went on for a long time. His advisers thought winning the election on the ticket of the ruling party was more important than winning on the opposition ticket. As an opposition, there won't be spill over 'food' for them. But a win with the ruling party ensured food in abundance. Secondly, they thought Esole being a Mayor was more lucrative since it would give them unlimited powers and opportunities to exploit the community by way of acquiring building plots in new layouts, and revenging the humiliation they had suffered in the hands of the outgoing administration. That was what the incumbent Mayor and his counsellors were doing. They were seizing people's lands and converting them into theirs. Acquiring land certificates was their ultimate goal. Esole's advisers wanted to enjoy those privileges also. So long as they were concerned, he had to contest for the Mayoralty or abandon the venture.

Esole argued that their interest could not be based on mean personal gains but on lofty communal interests. They had to avoid nepotism and all ills of the old regime if they were to make a mark of progress. The country in general, and Lebmot in particular had been and were being duped by a grasping set up for years and this was the time when a party of foresight had to redeem the people. So, although Mayoralty was more lucrative, the Parliamentary position was more important because it offered opportunities for exposing the ills of the government with the aim of replacing it. The Serious People's Deliverance Party (SPDP) owed its people the duty to redeem them from the crutches of misappropriation. Once they got the government, there would be spill over food for the street beggar. They had to fight for the good of the common man.

After a prolonged debate, Esole's disgruntled advisers gave in for him to contest for the Parliamentary position on the opposition ticket. They chose the SPRP.

Chapter Eight

After choosing the political party and the position he would contest for, Esole decided to see the SDO once more. When he got to the SDO's office, he rose, gave him a warm handshake and made him sit down. Echoes of Esole's popularity had reached him and he was manifesting his respect for the prospective MP of the area.

"Prof., or should I say '*Monsieur le Deputé*,'" he addressed Esole. "I'm glad you have come. I was about sending for you. You know my position does not warrant me to do overt politics. But blood flows in me as it does in any other person. We must lay down strategies now to destroy the incumbent Mayor once and for all. He must go. So, I want you to use every iota of your resources to start beating him from the reorganization of the party. He should lose his positions of chairman of the party, Mayor of Lebmot, and even citizenship of Lebmot. Party reorganization elections are next week. I have already inserted your name in the list as a candidate for the party chairman with the understanding that if you win, you will cede the chairmanship to one eloquent young man I shall want you to incorporate into your team. You should nominate him for Mayor. He has a good following and the two of you will surely win the hearts of the electorate. He is called Ebong Emmanuel."

"That should be the business of the party. The ruling party can reorganize its organs the way it chooses. I don't think it will be wise for me to interfere. I am running for the opposition," Esole responded.

“What, Professor!” the SDO exclaimed.

“Yes, the exploitation of the masses is done by people this ravenous regime has put in place. What the Mayor is doing is not different from what the Ministers and the Director Generals are doing. The whole set up is a fief of thievery, kleptocracy at its peak. I can’t be part of it,” Esole said.

The SDO went dead. He lost his train of thought and stood transfixed for a very long time. When he recovered from the shock, he told Esole he could not believe what he had said. He advised that Esole returns to his house and think over the matter overnight. He would believe him only the next day. If he came and confirmed that he had not made a mistake, he would take him for his word. The next day Esole reiterated that he had not made a mistake. He had opted for the opposition because the salvation of the country could only be done by the opposition.

“Which party have you chosen?” the SDO asked greatly disappointed.

“The Serious People’s Deliverance Party (SPDP).”

“The party that provoked riots after the last Presidential elections that it claimed it had won but was deprived of victory by the Minister of Territorial Administration? The party we have been instructed to regard as enemy number one of the country? That party is in our red books? Professor, what is the driving force behind your decision?”

“The nation, our loving and beautiful nation.”

“This nation? This nation is your driving force? What a farce! Terrible!”

“Yes, This nation, the shrine of our forefathers.”

“Professor, I believe you have been misled by unknown forces in town. Please return and tomorrow we shall review your stand.”

The next day, Esole told the SDO that he was the master of himself and there were no forces that were in control of him.

“Then to be frank with you, you can’t win elections here. You can’t win in spite of your popularity. We shall prefer a nonentity member of the ruling party to defeat the incumbent than a genius from another party to beat him.”

“So be it. So, you know the results of elections before they are held?” Esole asked with a frown.

“Professor, look, not all secretes are secrets. It is an open secret that I belong to the SPDP. I militate in the party but I can’t make you win here. The Senior Divisional Officer, (SDO) himself a member of the SPDP can’t make you win here. That is true. See, in the last election, wherever the opposition won, both the Sub and the Senior Divisional Officers were replaced and ever since, they have not been reappointed. Do you know what it means to lose power for a minute? It is not even the money that matters. It is the provocation and degradation the dismissed suffers in the hands of people they bossed. Do you think professor that I can sacrifice my position because of your unwise choice of a political party? I call it unwise because we have not yet reached the stage of change. Change can’t come to this country now. And that is why all of us are conscious not to be victims of wishful thinking. Please reconsider your stand and let us all win. Politics in Africa is personal survival not collective survival.”

“SDO, I am surprised to hear you say that. I thought you were a progressive. I have admired your frankness but I think there are times when a man should go beyond personal interest. We are in a democracy so to speak, and for goodness sake, I would want to stake my popularity against the intrigues of your administration. I want to contest elections and win on merit and not to contest and be given a win through rigging.”

“Professor, you have used the word democracy. There is nothing like democracy in Africa. Elections are not democratic if the ruling party loses. Elections are not

democratic if the incumbent President does not win. So, the ruling party must win and there is nothing we can do to change the situation. Can you cite a country where your ideals have prevailed in Africa? That is Puritanism, a dream-world policy."

"Yes, you are right SDO but take note that those ideals exist in countries which handed over governance to us at independence. There was something good in them. There is something good in them today. And in spite of years of abuse we are bound to emulate."

"That is it. I wish you good luck," the SDO said and bade Esole good bye.

Chapter Nine

While the ruling party went on with reorganizing its basic organs, Esole set his campaign teams on the move. They were to penetrate all the nooks and crannies of Lebmot Sub-Division. He hired motorcycles and the aggrieved boys (graduates who had remained for years without employment) went out with the message of redemption. They were doing the sensitizing and path-finding softening of hearts of the John the Baptist campaign type – a preparation for the messiah himself to come and talk to the people. Although the primary aim at that stage was to study the ground and so prepare on how to tackle the hurdles, the children went in for an all out campaign. They brought in such good news of mass defections into the SPRP that he thought of going to bluff the SDO that he would win whether they liked it or not, and to warn him that there would be unpredictable uprising if the administration attempted to rig the elections. On second thought however, he decided to play the gentleman.

The hurdles the party faced according to the boys were money to lubricate the campaign at all stages and vehicles to protect them from rain. The administration had programmed the elections in the heart of the rainy season to put the opposition in a terrible campaign disadvantage. Esole told the boys that the party could do only what its means would provide. He emphasized on self sacrifice under the circumstances. And to show that he meant business, he had to prove beyond doubt that he was self sacrificing. So, he left for Dande to borrow money from thrift and loan groups to revamp his campaign.

He borrowed FCFA 10,000,000 and returned to Lebmot. He now looked more confident than before. Although he did not tell his followers the amount he had brought, they skipped around with tall talk that the hippopotamus would be equal to the elephant in the oncoming tug of war. To set themselves to effective work, they looked at the demography of Lebmot Sub-Division. It was necessary to know it and so assign more dynamic teams to thickly populated electoral zones. They found out that Lebmot central was very thickly populated. The administration had divided it up into 12 electoral zones cutting off the EDC camps which were mostly made up of non-natives. Each zone had more than 2000 electorates and the 3 EDC camps had about 1000 each. The periphery of Lebmot central was broken up into 8 electoral zones with each village having about 200 electorates. Out of Lebmot central, the administration had divided up the Sub-Division into Western, Eastern, Northern and Southern electoral zones. Western and Northern zones were the most populous. They needed as much interest as Lebmot central. As the teams got to action, there was a rumour that a teacher had been murdered and his private parts taken.

The population of Lebmot remained in shock. Everybody doubted who might have killed an innocent teacher and taken his parts. Suspicion started centring on the incumbent Mayor. It was alleged that finding the odds too much against him, he had killed the teacher and taken his parts to Ojebu Ode where his marabouts would concoct election winning talismans for him. If that were true, Esole thought it would work in his favour. Although he did not want to capitalize on anybody's misfortune, he kept his fingers crossed with suppressed joy. And true to expectation, even the Mayor's closest robots withdrew from him for some time.

A few days later, there was a rumour that it was a female candidate who was to challenge the incumbent Mayor and not a male. That meant that he had to kill a woman in order

to use her private parts to concoct talismans for victory. In a bid to do so, it was said, he invited his secretary one night for emergency duties. As she prepared to go, her mother stood on her way and that foiled the Mayor's chances. So long as those rumours lingered on, Esole and his party knew the ruling party was having a moral beating. They did not want to capitalize on the rumours. They just went on with their preparations for the big showdown with the ruling party.

The ruling party reorganization elections came and went with the incumbent losing the mayoralty. That was the ruling party's business. Parliamentary elections were heating up. The MP for the area went into hiding because of the overwhelming evidence that he would lose. The SPDP campaigned hard, really hard. The rainy season came in, in full force. Esole's boys caught pneumonia from exposure to rain and cold. In spite of that they forged on. It was a do or die situation.

The ruling party was nowhere to be seen. The SPRP was all over the place. Their banners were posted at every corner of Lebmot and all villages of the Sub-Division – in churches, community halls, schools, hospitals, and bars. The SPRP was supreme. The SDO was amazed at what looked like its unstoppable leadership in the poles. Then, four days to the election-day, the Minister of Junglety came with a fleet of 12 Pajeros, 8 Landcruisers and 5 Fort Jeeps all marked CA (Car Administratif) Administrative vehicle. Esole went straight and complained to the Commandant of the Gendarmerie that the Minister was about to misuse government cars for party elections. This, he pointed out was unconstitutional, and the gendarmerie had to impound the vehicles and stop the abuse of government property by unscrupulous individuals whether they were Ministers or not. The commandant peered at him as if he thought he was insane.

“Professor,” he addressed Esole. “If mere Directors use CA cars for private interests, what more of Ministers? Furthermore, the Minister is using the cars for elections that would put the government in place. Do you want me to commit suicide by challenging the Minister in his rightful use of vehicles of his Ministry?”

That response wrenched Esole’s heart from its hinges. He took a deep breath and in exhaling, he asked the Commandant whether he knew the meaning of what he had said. The commandant said he did.

“You don’t,” he said emphatically. “You don’t because you imply that something is seriously wrong with our country. In other countries, officers like you know there is a difference between a government and a political party. Political parties don’t use government property as if it were party property.”

“I took oath of allegiance to the President of this country. I have to protect and defend him and when it comes to elections, usher him into victory. So in this crucial election, he has to be protected.”

“That is true. You took the oath of allegiance to him in as far as he remained within the prescriptions of the constitution. In other words, you took oath of allegiance to protect the constitution of this country.”

“And that is what I am doing. The President is the constitution.”

Having failed to put reasoning into the gendarme, Esole shook his head and returned to continue with his project. The Minister did not only bring vehicles, he also brought rain. In addition, he brought all civil servants who hail from the Sub-Division to campaign for the incumbent. He told all top civil servants, especially the Directors to tell their village people that if the opposition won in their area, the government would dismiss them from their positions. He said, if the opposition won in this area, his area, he would

lose his Ministerial post and his prospects of becoming Prime Minister would be dashed. He had to protect his post at all cost. In a short while, his fleet of vehicles covered and even went beyond all the ground Esole's boys had covered in several weeks.

In spite of that, his people had nothing to tell the population. The failures of the 26 year old regime of the ruling party were evident everywhere. The Minister had made several empty promises before and was sort of dry in what to tell the people again. So, he aimed at the chiefs. He convened a chiefs' conference and sent his fleet of vehicles to the villages to bring them to Lebmot. To entice a heavy turnout he sent FCFA 20,000 pre-attendance stipend to each invitee with word that heavier packs were on their way. He hired 'Hotel de Bon Conscience' for the chiefs for two days. Thus for the first time and for two days the chiefs of Lebmot Sub-Division were treated to the bounty of the coffers of the Ministry of Junglety. The catering services of the Hotel were well schooled on how to handle the chiefs. Two overnight meetings ended in a vote of confidence in the Head of State, his Government, and the Minister. At the end, the Minister gave each chief, FCFA 150,000 and on oath, each of them promised to abide by the motor of the ruling party – non-compromise with the opposition.

The Minister then said none of them should vote for SPDP party which he labelled Stupid People's Destructive Party. Conspiratorial squads were formed and promised FCFA 50,000 each if they carried out their jobs well. This was done openly and condoned by the police and the military. Some chiefs who decided to spend an extra day in Lebmot sent word to their subjects at home to switch camp. The beggar chief of Lebmot central, a PhD cap-in-hand stooge decreed by Muankum that if one vote went to the opposition, the non-natives of the area would be repatriated to their villages of origin. He even suggested that the

opposition should be banned. News reached Esole that the team he had sent to West Bassiland was being booed and chased out of the place by the very people who had hailed them a few days earlier. People told him to surrender. His advisers blamed him for not heeding to advice. There was panic in his camp, but he was steadfast.

He stood firm. He knew the external manifestations for the ruling party did not reflect the people's convictions. Rain was falling doubly as the election-day drew closer. That gave untold advantage to the Minister's campaign fleets of vehicles. The motorcycles the SPDP had hired were constantly packed at the verandas where the boys took shelter. They had had two near fatal accidents and they got frightened.

The early hours of election-day were bright. The weather was wonderful – giving opportunities for the boys' cycles to drop the electoral officers at their respective polling stations. The coordinating team patrolled every polling station and found to their delight that all was moving well. American and European observers were particularly happy with the conduct of the elections at those early hours. There was discipline and order. There were signs that the opposition had picked up. By mid afternoon, it was getting crystal clear that the opposition had an overwhelming advantage over the ruling party in spite of the Minister's fleets of vehicles and millions of francs. By early evening, the sky turned ominous. Flashes of lightening crisscrossed the sky as it trembled under the weight of pregnant clouds. The foreign observers left, convinced that all would end well. Towards the official closing time of polling, the skies opened and the deluge that followed was unprecedented. The Minister's fleets of campaign vehicles now took control of polling stations. Lights went out. The police and military sealed off polling stations to prevent opposition violence. SPRP polling officers were threatened in the darkness and

asked to switch camp. Some did, others were adamant. News got to Esole. He and two other coordinators got some boys and climbing on their bikes, dashed to places of irregularities. Unfortunately the military barred them from entering the polling stations. Counting started. Results were proclaimed. The ruling party won by a landslide. Esole and his men protested. Results and their protests were carried to Megnab, the Divisional Head Quarters for recounting. Slight, face-saving modifications were made and the results were forwarded to Dande. The Supreme Court upheld the results.

Chapter Ten

The SPDP lost the elections but not the will to survive. They lost elections in victory. The ruling party won elections in defeat. That is the antitheses of this fatherland. Esole was composed. He did not want anything to work on his morale. So, though his followers had wanted him to convene a meeting for them to see where and what went wrong, he refused because he thought such a meeting would work on people's sentiments and generate quarrels. So long as he was concerned, each member of his team had done a marvellous job. That they lost was heartrending. That they could know why they lost was illusory. And if they went in for self-examination, it could lead to laying blames where blames were not due. In a country and continent where democracy means that the incumbent must win, where individuals contested elections with governments, where no matter the worth of a candidate, so long as he/she stood for the ruling party he/she must win, elections had no meaning. In a country and continent where Heads of States campaigned for high office through the medium of television and the radio, where after winning high office they alienated themselves from the electorate, there was something more wrong than the ordinary man can appreciate. In a country and continent where a contestant can be put at the background and a Minister steps in to salvage him from imminent loss, there is something very wrong. And as such, the honest loser should not get the guillotine for himself.

One evening as Esole sat in a bar sipping beer to pass time, a gentleman who introduced himself to him as Njume, came by and asked whether he was Esole. He said he was. The gentleman rubbed his hands together, pulled closer and said, "Please Prof., I am sorry to introduce myself to you as a person you will never forgive and forget. I am sorry to tell you that I was one of the citizens of Lebmot who was brought in here from Timbe to foil your bid to get into Parliament. I am sorry to tell you this. Prof., I should congratulate you most heartily for your brilliant performance at the polls. To be candid, you were doomed to lose the elections. In previous elections, government agents sabotaged electricity. But in this case, it was thunder which knocked out the lights. And once lights went out, especially as foreign observers had gone, the police and the military the Minister had arranged to handle the rigging process went into action. Although I was incorporated into the rigging lot, your overwhelming victory convinced me that you were the people's choice and nothing should disturb you. But then, a twig does not build a fence. So, I helped rig in favour of the ruling party. I congratulate you most heartily especially in the way you have taken it. Any other person would have been greatly aggrieved and would have been pulling faces. I have observed with great admiration, the way you mix with us, your enemies, even with the elected MP who relied on the Minister's financial might to undo you. Please take heart."

"Thank you Mister," Esole responded. "I admire you more than you admire me. This is the first time I have met a person of dignity, a person who not only admits his wrongdoing but recognizes the need for apology. The elections are over. Our relationships are just beginning. Before the elections, we were Bassiland people. We loved and protected this dear and proud motherland in different ways. So long as I am concerned, elections are not a breeding ground for enemies as some people think and make of them. They are grounds for knowing the problems of our area,

knowing the potential manpower of this wonderful land, and laying out plans for its development. And here I challenge your Minister. Did you try to find out whether after all the sacrifices you made for him he cared to know your name? Does he know the names of any other of your conspirators? Do you think he cares? Has he a plan for building up the manpower of this beautiful and fertile motherland so that he can have a strong team to face the challenges of the nepotistic politics of our country? Other Ministers put their people in strong places so that together they can constitute a strong force, a force to command respect and admiration by other groups, and therefore a force that can't be threatened and a force that is consulted before major decisions are taken. But see, your man has been Minister for more than twelve years, yet there is not one single boy/girl who can say, he has helped them get a scavenger's position. He is a do it alone and enjoy it alone person. At first he said he was appointed by the President and not elected by our people. As such, he owed them nothing. But what about now? Our people have now indirectly voted for him by voting the EPAD MP to demonstrate to the Head of State that they are supporters of his party and as such he should maintain him in the Ministerial post he has been occupying for twelve years. Look, he and his team have won. Let's all help him help our motherland win, win by having higher prices for their basic commodities, win by making their sore soles move on solid good roads and not mud and dust that had been the fate of their fore-parents, win that all those who saw Bassiland yesterday should say with pride that there was a great difference between yesterday and today. Victory centred on an individual is not victory. Victory must be collective. And the victors must be able to say, we fought together, we won together, we are enjoying together. That is my wish for you and those who set up your election rigging machinery. I wish you luck."

“Wao! Prof., You have anesthetized me again. The population admired your speeches, appalling revelations of our socio-economic, politico-moral and ethno-national mess that is usually whitewashed by our politicians. Prof., but why did you not contest for the party in power? Your victory would have been a walk over.”

“Simple. If you have a quarrel with a crocodile, don’t go bathing in the river. I have countless grudges against your party in power and its government. So, I found it inadmissible to fit myself into its programme. A win on its ticket would not have soothed things.”

“Prof., we shall miss you for a very long time. I regret, but as I have said, a twig does not build a fence. Be blessed. Please, take a beer on me,” he requested and after seeing the beer opened, he left.

As the fellow left Esole, it dawned on him that he had to return to Dande. He had to tell his thrift and loans groups that he had lost the elections and was in real financial shit. He had to reassure them that the loans would be repaid. Yes, he had a bleeding financial nose from the elections. Fortunately for him, his wife was not around to taunt him for the misadventure. He was as sensitive as a sensor and any unkind word could kindle unspeakable anger. He was composed and so braced himself for the appalling realities in Dande.

He left the bar with a slight headache. He got to his house, tidied up the room and got ready to leave for Dande the next day.

Chapter Eleven

The next day he left for Dande. To occupy himself during the journey, he bought four newspapers. All of them discussed the elections. They praised the ruling party for its magnificent victory. The “Ewawa Tribune”

captioned the election, ‘Minister Bulekole Wins By A Landslide At Pekuguba Division’. The “Ewawa X-Ray,” captioned it, ‘The Victory Of The Head of State’. The “Guardian” captioned it, ‘The Opposition in Disarray,’ and the “Times” captioned it, ‘A Vote of Confidence in the President’.

After reading the headlines, Esole felt something nauseating devastate his bowels. He peered at the future of Ewawa, saw the void and shook his head. Even journalists in Ewawa were not worth the salt. Did those who wrote those captions know that they implied that the President of Ewawa had short circuited oncoming Presidential elections? Those of them who contested the election for the opposition were not forewarned of the triple implications. Now which of the elections had they contested and lost? In losing, he, Esole lost only the Parliamentary seat. If he had won, the Minister would have lost his Ministerial seat, the President would have lost his Presidential seat. So, while they of the opposition girded their loins for one election, the EPAD had prepared for three in one and so had used all the machinery of power to win.

Esole reached Dande in the early hours of the evening. In the morning, he went to the POSB to find out whether things had changed. Nothing had changed. The gate had

been repaired and was locked. Two military men stood guard. He moved away and returned home. In the afternoon, the radio announced that a Presidential Decree had replaced the Minister of Post and Telecommunication and the Director of the POSB. The population was jubilant, expecting the immediate arrest and incarceration of the suspects of the POSB embezzlement. But for months nothing had happened to them. The new Minister promised thorough investigation of the POSB problem. As the population waited, the new Director instituted a payment scheme which entailed a 15% deduction of whatever bank withdrawals were made. No reasons for the deductions were given. Nobody knew who benefited from the deductions. Desperate customers went in for it. Esole wrote his wife and asked her to permit him withdraw her money on those terms. She accepted and told him to withdraw all, and if he succeeded, he should pay his debts and use the rest of the money to send their two last children to meet her in Britain. She said because their daughter was pregnant she was bound to wait for her to deliver and perhaps give her a helping hand in babysitting. That would perhaps take more than a year. So, her return to Ewawa was indefinite. She added that she was on a handsome stipend (four times more than what she got here) for the domestic work she did for their daughter and her husband and had asked them to preserve something for Esole too should he decide to join her in Britain. The job would be temporary, just to make him survive before he got a job with a University. So, after accepting to lose 15% of FCFA 5,000,000. Esole closed his wife's account with the POSB. He used some of the money to break his debt with his thrift and loan groups by half and with the interest per month greatly reduced he thought things over with a much more relaxed mind.

The worst thing that happens to a civil servant in Ewawa is going on retirement when he hasn't enough savings to sustain him for the two, three or four years he has to wait

before he starts getting his pension. And who in Ewawa has had such savings since 1984 when Saul Kilcam the President, institutionalized nepotism and kleptocracy? The devastating economic and moral crises, the sudden cut in salaries and the high cost of living turned low and middle income earners into beggars. Their salaries could not sustain their families to the middle of the month, which meant that they had to borrow to get to the end of the month. And if they had to borrow to survive for the month it meant that they could not save.

The Ministry of Finance is punctual in cutting people's salaries once they attain retirement age, but though the retiree's documents are there in the archives, no worker has time to get them to establish his pension. No, the retiree must go and pay homage to workers of the Ministry of Finance. He must go and surrender himself for spiting and humiliation. He must go to betray himself of how careless he had been in handling copies of items of documents he had established when he was employed. He must go to furnish the Ministry with certified items of documents he had furnished when he was employed some thirty or forty years back. Each item certified bears a fiscal and communal stamp of FCFA 1,000 and FCFA 500 respectively and all may cost as much as FCFA 40,000. And if the person shows signs that he had lost the items in a mishap, and wanted the money mongering hounds of the Ministry to find the originals in the archives, he would have to pay dearly for their services and the use of the archives. The shams then make fresh demands for impossible items and invent a thousand lies about the dossier. After making the poor retiree believe that without their special interventions, the dossiers wouldn't be accepted, they rape the miserable fellow's conscience and make him accept to lose 20 to 30 percent of his pension to them. The poor fellow sulks in disgust and develops high blood pressure instantaneously. Many of

such people die before they receive their pension. They die not because of age, but because they are sentenced to death by an unscrupulous regime they had served so diligently and devotedly.

Esole's oncoming retirement loomed into his eyes as a grubby reality. He was not only poor. He was heavy with debts imposed on him by this despondent administration. That meant of course, that he would be doubly miserable. His wife was abroad surviving on a handsome stipend and wanted him, a University Professor to come along with her to survive on an in-law given stipend. In-law given stipend to him, meant that his wife was living on charity. He doubted his wife's reasoning. Our people say, 'When a drum changes position, its sound changes'. His wife's sound had changed from what he deciphered in her letter. He had to work for his survival if he joined her in Britain though she was on a handsome stipend. So, if he sent the children there, would she sustain them with her stipend? If he were fine in Ewawa and sent them help that would be reasonable. But for a beggar husband to send children to a wife on charity, a wife who feigned affluence, sounded unreasonable to him. Esole thought he was now caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Chapter Twelve

To be candid, the humiliation and spiting a retiree undergoes in the Ministry of Finance is so petrifying that people who have the means stay out of it by abandoning their pensions. They cede the problem to their children. They prefer to die without their pension than go through the ordeal. Esole thought he could do the same by going to Britain. He had done his PhD in Sheffield. He knew the place. But for the cold, he would have remained and taught there. So the Rubicon that his wife thought she was trying to help him cross was within his reach. He could go there, stay in Sheffield, his old place for months without informing her and his in-law and surprise them with an invitation to visit him when he was well established. He had a trump card – his qualification that could sell in many Universities. But it was not only the Ministry of Finance that humiliated people in Ewawa.

Ewawans faced humiliation wherever they went. With the ruined economy and unemployment, millions of Ewawans were fleeing their country. Most of them fled through clandestine ways. Only an insignificant number attempted to go through official channels. This made the embassies to tighten up scrutiny of documents thus making it very difficult for honest Ewawans to obtain visas without going through the most mortifying procedures. It was heartrending to see lines of people snaking out in a shower of rain in front of shacks the French call their Embassy in a country they have exploited since 1916 and in the end, the poor Ewawans will not be given the visas. So, so long as

one was in Ewawa or was an Ewawan, they could not avoid humiliation. The British were not openly callous. But anybody who has lived in Britain and is sharp enough to decipher their cynicism from feigned politeness would want to avoid it.

Now stretched taut by these two monsters – humiliation at the Ministry of Finance and degradation at the Embassies, Esole fought against his conscience and took the lesser shame. He applied for a visa for Britain. Two weeks later, with tailored politeness the counter-girl at the British High Commission told him they would readily give him a visa if his wife returned. He knew his wife would never return. And so, he had come to a dead end.

The failure to obtain a visa for Britain enraged him and made him reproach himself on why, in the name of goodness he had worked for nearly 40 years and had been unable to save money to carry him on for even a month of his retirement. He made a survey of his past. He started work in 1972 as a helping hand to a Professor. He was on a salary of FCFA 300,000. In 1974, he went to Sheffield where he did his Masters and PhD. He returned to Ewawa in 1982 when Saul Kilcam had just taken over power from the deceased old man. He was employed as a Senior Lecturer on a salary of FCFA 750,000. In 1984 Saul Kilcam indirectly privatized all government Ministries and Parastatals. Since he could go on official and private visits to Europe for three to four months, each Minister owned his Ministry and could auction it out, use its budget the way he wanted, employ only people from his or related clans, or do whatever he liked to do with the Ministry. Director Generals could do the same with their corporations. Bankers owned their banks and they could do whatever they dreamt fit to do with them.

And when he happened to return in poor or good health and the population told him about the wrongdoings of his Ministers and Director Generals, he would ask them to show

proof. Economic crises set in, the government announced that government owned vehicles were a liability and so they had to be sold. Ministers went wild with jubilation as that announcement gave them the lee way for owning newly acquired government cars. With the selling of the cars, the hundreds of Billions worth Administrative Garage was closed and brand new cars were sold at FCFA 30,000 to the relatives of Ministers, all from the same three ruling clans. And very soon the Ministry of Finance announced that the selling of administrative cars was not enough. It had to be complemented with reductions in salaries if the country were to survive. Esole found himself earning FCFA 250, 000. And he had to remain on that as long as the Saul Kilcam's administration lasted. In other words, his income had to be frozen as long as Saul Kilcam's administration lasted.

Now, could he blame himself for not being capable of saving money to sustain him till he got his pension? And what about the debts he had to pay? Was it carelessness and extravagant living that had made him incur them? As these things bugged him, an idea came to his mind. He would have to return to his extremely fertile homeland and do farming. He thought if he stayed in Dande, he would develop hypertension and die thus giving his opponents cause to be jubilant. "A living man is never defeated, only a dead one is," he told himself. The problem the world faced was that of feeding the population. Once he went on retirement, he would go to West Bassiland and buy a farm and do modern farming. He would rear goats, pigs and fowls and cultivate coffee and cocoa. There in the bush, nobody will disturb his peace. He would be too busy to think of the outside world, and so he would be removed from the mainstream of politics and other worries a concerned citizen should have about a sick society.

Chapter Thirteen

Esole did his work diligently, communicated with his wife and daughter, feigned to be a happy granddad and while he waited for his retirement time to come, he paid what remained of his debts gradually. His children performed well at school and in spite of the difficulty of managing a home, he was happy with himself. He had stumbled on a Benso boy who helped with his housekeeping and was very satisfied with him. The boy said he was a victim of the closure of the Administrative Garage where he had been an apprentice mechanic driver. Probably hard times had driven him to selling cigarettes by a bar near Esole's house. Time and again Esole asked him to assist him in doing some domestic work. That assistance gradually developed into very close friendship and the boy Beri, moved into Esole's servants' quarters. Beri became very useful in house management.

One day, there was an auction sales of very old vehicles at the Administrative Garage. Beri advised Esole to buy one of the scraps. Unfortunately he couldn't because of the debts he was paying. So, he advised Esole's neighbour to buy it. He did and Beri installed a second-hand engine in it and after panel-beating and painting it, it became the wonder-work of the quarters. Esole was so infatuated with his wonder boy that he suggested to move with him to Bassiland upon his retirement. Two years later, he went on retirement.

He wrote to his wife about his intensions to do farming and received her approval. He further suggested that he would sell their house in Dande in order to have enough

money to send the children to her, invest some of the money in farming, and have some remains to maintain himself while waiting for his pension. He said he had followed up her documents too and her pension was due in a few months. To all these she gave her approval.

One day as Esole sat at the veranda reading old newspapers, he happened to come across the papers he had brought from Lebmot after the election. It is often said that a newspaper is never old until the information it carries has been well consumed and digested. The middle pages of "Ewawa Tribune" which had not interested him at the time, came to light. He read the tabulated results of the election and was so shocked at what he read that he reproached himself for not raising hell when he had protested to the Electoral Commission about the election irregularities. The figures were so incompatible that any right thinking person would have blamed the powers that be that there was foul play. For one thing, Western Bassiland villages which he had heard were in fact hamlets had more electorates than Lebmot wards which everybody knew were more populous. Secondly, the figures given for 'number actually voted' and the sum totals of the parties did not correspond.

Esole got mad and thought of making a powerful protest. But it was almost two years since the elections and no amount of protest could change the results at the time. For two days he did not eat. But just as he was about to brighten up on the third day, there was a rumour that the government was about buying official cars once more because it had realized that the administrative machinery could not function effectively without official vehicles. Very soon, private newspapers started carrying pictures of the latest makes in Japanese and French vehicles the government was buying. It had moved from buying FCFA 8,000,000 old model vehicles to FCFA 75,000,000 new model ones. Prominent among them were Japanese Pajeros. And while

the Ministers bought cars for their Ministries, they bought for their families, after all there was no difference between Ministry and family, and so, some families ended up having 35 vehicles in their compounds. The buying of exaggeratedly expensive cars when most Ewawans could not provide their families with breakfast worked on Esole's nerves and almost wrenched his soul from his body. He felt so bad that he decided to leave Dande. He advertised his house for sale and had customers almost immediately.

After selling the house and sending his children abroad, he told Beri about his intension to return to Baksiland. Beri opted to go with him. When Esole arrived at Lebmot, he met one of the boys who had campaigned for him in West Bassiland during the election. The boy told him about a farm advertised by a man desperate to have solid cash. After the boy had given every detail about the farm, Esole sent his younger brother Etame, Beri and the boy to inspect the farm. Upon their return, his younger brother recommended the purchase of the farm. It was a farm being sold by a farmer whose son had passed the entrance exam into Sasse College. The man needed money at all cost to send his son to Sasse, and thus break the myth that only children from the chief's compound could go to college.

Beri saw the state of the road in the dry season and advised Esole to buy a Toyota Pickup to make good the purchase of the farm. Cocoa is harvested in the raining season and it must be transported to the main road town of Tonye. Without a good Pickup the cocoa would rot at Nidong where the farm was. Esole was now divided. If he wasted time, somebody else could buy the farm. Good farms were rare. So, he entrusted the purchase of the farm into the hands of his junior brother while he and Beri went to Tuada seaport to buy a second-hand Pickup. After buying it Beri told him that it was imperative for him to work on the Pickup in his tribe's man's garage in Tuada. It was necessary to do

so, because the spare parts were available there and he could get the assistance of his tribe's man should there be complications. Esole gave him the money and after buying the parts, he asked him to return to Lebmot and wait for him there. Beri re-enforced the shock absorbers of the Pickup, changed the engine from diesel to petrol and tested the chained tyres.

Chapter Fourteen

Esole could not recognize the vehicle. It looked like a military truck too slow to cover the distances he thought he would be making. Although he had thought of spending most of his time at Nidong, he had been advised to make Tonye his main base. He was told to live in a semi-township, employ workers in the farm, build them sheds to live in, and visit them time and again to see how they were faring on. Living in Nidong would be very distressing to a person who had lived most of his years on earth in the capital city of his country. It was therefore better for him to make a midway choice. And so, he chose to settle in Tonye on the main road to Bamfi. Tonye was a developed village, with facilities reminiscent of those of a township. It was 23 Km, from Nidong.

“The vehicle is not slow. It has been reconditioned in such a way that in the dry season its chained tyres can be replaced with ordinary ones for normal speed. It is the chained tyres that make it cumbersome and slow,” Beri told his master.

“What about the height? Isn’t it too high?” Esole asked.

“That is the ideal height for a Pickup that has to carry twenty bags of cocoa and slash through mud and deep potholes. Once the vehicle loads to capacity, you will see the height greatly reduced,”

“This is a vehicle on crutches’, Esole teased and laughed.

“That is a super vehicle, a bulldozer that would slither effortlessly through mud. I have reinforced it more than we do at home. Our roads are equally bad but our mechanics are equal to the task. We are considered opposition and

nobody cares about us. We never quaver cap in hand, begging government to repair the roads for us. In the rainy season our vehicles do the miracle of connecting us with the rest of the world. This vehicle will do the same for you. That is the ideal vehicle for the Nidong road in the rainy season. It will out manoeuvre all other vehicles,” Beri said confidently.

“I hear that road gets really bad in the rainy season. If the vehicle performs as you say, we may even indulge in buying cocoa from farmers who will be unable to transport their produce by head-load to the main road,” Esole remarked.

“What do you expect? A road that is never maintained should get bad in the raining season. I have confidence in that vehicle. And if everything works well, you may find yourself in the heart of the cocoa trade in the area.”

Esole and Beri left for Tonye the next day to look for accommodation. They saw a fenced estate with dilapidating warehouses and were told it was the abandoned property of the defunct Carburry & Fry, a once cocoa purchasing company and backbone of Tonye economy. The company had closed down because of excessive taxes and misappropriation of its funds by unscrupulous workers the government had imposed on it. Esole opted to buy the property and after thorough investigation, he saw the landlord, the person who had given the land to Carburry & Fry and to whom the defunct company had ceded the property. It was a property at a very strategic location – opposite the market through which the road to Nidong passed.

Esole was so excited with the location and general look of the estate that he paid for it without beating down the price. And with that he ran short of money. He had very little left to carry on with other activities. So, in spite of the odds at the Ministry of Finance, he had to return to Dande to follow up his pension and that of his wife. He thought if

he got the two pensions, he would not only replace Carburry & Fry by purchasing its estate, he would replace it by being the new economic focus of Tonye. And if he became the economic magnet, he would become the political catalyst of the area.

Upon arrival at Dande, he faced the odds with tact. Instead of going to see office boys for business, he went and saw the Private Secretary of the Director of Salaries in the Ministry of Finance. He talked to her in frank terms and promised her 20% of the two pensions if she would hasten the process. She nodded in approval and promised that the two pensions would be paid in two weeks, an unbelievably short time for such transactions to mature. In two weeks Esole happily gave her FCFA 5,000,000 of the two pensions. It was a big loss but he did not reproach himself for capitulating to corruption – every cloud has its silver lining. The loss he had incurred was insignificant so long as it gave him a handsome capital to start his business. He returned to Tonye really happy.

Esole was now much more interested in rehabilitating the estate than going to supervise the workers at Nidong. He had never been to Nidong. During the election, he had concentrated his campaign in Lebmot central where he thought there were more electorates and had sent only the boys to West Bassiland. The cocoa season was fast approaching and that required that he set the warehouses for big business. He rehabilitated offices, converted one warehouse into a bar-restaurant and built plank but self-contained rest rooms to complement the Eldora-do outlook of the place.

The first year of bar-restaurant, rest rooms and cocoa clandestine business yielded so much cash that Esole thought he had wasted his time teaching at the University. He bought a brand new car for himself and another pickup for his business around town. The business had great prospects so it could no longer be done clandestinely. Furthermore

clandestine business had its disadvantage in not giving its proprietor the publicity and prominence Esole was seeking. So, he told Beri he wanted to register the business to avoid embarrassment should the forces of law and order come to control him. Beri said it was a wise decision but advised that the registration should be scaled down to bar and restaurant only. The cocoa trade should be left out to reduce taxes. The cocoa that would be brought into the warehouse would be taken for cocoa harvested from his farm. Nobody knew the size of his farm and so they won't be able to determine whether he bought cocoa or not.

"That would be cheating the government," Esole remarked.

"How sincere has the government been to its citizens?" Beri asked.

"Beri, the government is bad. But citizens should be good,"

"When they will heave taxes on you, you will say I warned you. Most businesses close in this country because of high taxes."

"Beri, there are public agents who evaluate businesses before they levy taxes. I believe what they frown at is when they discover a cover up."

"Sir, I worked at the Administrative Garage and heard what the big people said. Levying taxes is one way of controlling the opposition. Business men who don't belong or who don't sponsor the party in power are rendered bankrupt with heavy, very heavy taxes levied on them."

In spite of that, Esole went and registered his business as 'Eso & Sons Enterprises'. The sign board could be seen several hundred meters away. At night the neon lights installed all over the place, glowed with mute pride. Money came in. Esole grew in status building. News about him spread, and with that, untoward attention.

Chapter Fifteen

By the third year of business, Esole had not gone to Nidong to see his farm. Only Beri went there time and again. The workers at the farm did very well. The produce increased with constant clearing and punctual spraying. The people of Western Bassiland spent all their time at Eso & Son's on market days whenever they went to Tonye. They called it simply, Eso's Ltd., a fantastically romantic name to them.

The SDO, the Commissioner of Police and the Commandant of the Gendarmerie of Tonye Sub-Division were not happy with Esole's aloofness. He had not gone to see any of them, to greet them, to say that he was around their exclusive zone. That was not compatible with the norm. The SDO was particularly concerned with Esole's inroads to prosperity. He had heard about his political views, views opposed to those of the administration, and views that were now spreading like wild fire in his zone. He thus invited Esole to his office. After the customary cordialities and request to sit down, the SDO tried to fashion out an inoffensive approach to address Esole. Just when he pronounced Prof. they heard a sudden loud bang outside.

An unkempt taxi man rushed into the SDO's office panting and shivering.

"Please, please, please Sir, I, I've jam you. My motor has jam you. I parked my motor in front of you. The hand break fail me. The motor roll back, back and it jam your car," the fellow stammered.

The SDO and Esole rushed out and saw the atrocious scene. Due to hand brake failure the rusty taxi had rolled backwards and slammed into Esole's brand new car, causing major damage to the front part of the car. Esole got confused. The SDO was equally shocked. To ease him up, he sent for the police accident brigade. Two police officers came promptly, got the documents of the two vehicles, studied the situation of the vehicles, the state of the vehicles and sketched out the accident. Then they asked Esole and the taxi man to pay the inspection fee of FCFA 5,000 each. After they had paid, the police asked them to follow them to the police station. At the police station, the accident brigade handed over the matter to the Commissioner. He studied the documents keenly and said that they could not proceed with the procedure because Esole hadn't a certificate of road worthiness for his vehicle. The taxi had one dated the day before conspicuously posted on its windscreen.

"Prof. I am sorry to tell you that because you have not got a certificate of road worthiness, you are at fault in this matter. We would have impounded your vehicle until you brought the certificate, but because you have to repair your car and the taxi, we give you the benefit of the doubt. Please, return with your car, repair it and repair the taxi."

Esole shivered in anger as he moved homeward. He could not understand how justice worked in Ewawa.

"I am aggrieved, yet I'm asked to repair the vehicle of the culprit. Why should road worthiness certificate take precedence in this matter? What is the relationship?" he asked Beri upon his return.

"I am not surprised. You see, life is not a strait-jacket. The way you look at it is not the way the administration looks at it. I think the greatest harm education has done to you is making you look at the world as if it should have been virtuous all through. Virtue is for old widows and

orphans. The world is not virtuous. It is not and it can never be. Do you know Sir, that in Ewawa the police are in league with taxi drivers and Insurance Companies?"

"How is that?"

"Taxi drivers make themselves protégées of the accident brigade. They bribe the police directly by giving them hard cash and indirectly by taking their children to school free of charge with the understanding that the accident brigade would protect them whenever they get involved in an accident. The strategy works the same as it works with insurance companies. Insurance companies corrupt the accident brigade and when the brigade sees that the given insurance company would pay heavily for an accident, they mitigate its gravity, cling to a very insignificant weakness in the case against the aggrieved, and so frustrate him. In some cases they lose the documents or delay the process of justice."

"That is terrible! How then can a trustworthy person survive in this country? What is happening in the heartless capital called Dande is happening in the bushes where there should be sanity."

"That is not strange. As big fishes eat the small ones in oceans, so do they eat the small ones in rivers, streams and springs. I was a taxi driver before my brother Parliamentarian had me employed as an apprentice mechanic in the Administrative Garage. I accepted the job not because of the salary but because of the heavy fruit-yielding intrigues of working there. He told me he was sending me there because there was big business there. He said I had to listen to gossip, be in the process of deciding which administrative cars were to be given to members of Parliament and those that were to be auctioned out. It is big business and there is nothing rosary-reciting can do about it. I remember under the instructions of Parliamentarians, we removed engines from brand new Mercedes Benze, fitted them in Mercedes

Benze scraps then auctioned the old-looking Benze to the Parliamentarian behind the project. We then fitted the old engine in the brand new body. Sometimes traditional automobile Companies especially French companies bribed us to disable vehicles brought in by companies of other countries in order to discourage the government from buying vehicles from the countries.”

Beri, you make me develop nausea about our society. You make me sick.”

“Yes Sir. You are sick because you don’t know business. ‘Book’ has removed you from the mainstream of life in Ewawa. I have observed with concern that ever since we came here you have not gone to see the men that matter in this locality – the SDO, the Commissioner of police and the Commandant of the gendarmerie. To make good your stay here you have to see them. You even have to go to Tumba to pay homage to the Director of taxes. You have to do a lot.”

“So that another rusty taxi can come and destroy my car and get me repairing two cars?”

“The rusty taxi destroyed only the front of your car but I bet you, your adamant refusal to see the gods that be in this place will cause another rusty car to destroy the engine of your car.”

“What you are saying is tantamount to condoning bribery and corruption.”

“What do you call bribery and corruption? When Darwin talked about survival of the fittest what did he mean? Fittest does not mean academic certificates, size, power, force, age, numbers and what have you? Fittest means on-the-spot manoeuvring of the status quo for personal gain and that is what is considered success at the given time. Time and again politicians who lose elections complain of electoral fraud. Fraud in elections is simply out-manoevring the opponent for personal gain. And whether fraud succeeds or is imposed,

it is called victory and celebrated as such. Sir, do you think that if a lion kills a goat and eats it, it has committed a crime? No. Lions are meant to eat goats. I come from a very tight and conservative culture where the traditional rulers, the Nderons are almighty. Whatever they say we the lowly should do, we do. They in fact eat us, that is, they exploit us. By so doing, they prepare us to do the same when our turn comes. That is the way all round. Big men must eat small men. And by big men here I don't mean big in terms of age or education. No, that would mean being static. By big men at this epoch, I mean big men in terms of ethnic group, type of job, job position, and ability to out-manoeuvre the status quo. Our big men are meant to eat us. So I don't find anything wrong with that. Advantaged clans exploit disadvantaged ones. That is the natural trend. Survival depends on how one manipulates himself in the tangle. Last time when you went to Dande and came back smiling after only two weeks, I knew you had made business, big business. Business is the key of life."

"Beri, please leave me alone," Esole said with a taint of guilt and shame.

Chapter Sixteen

Shortly after Esole had repaired the two vehicles Beri got information that his uncle had died. He left for Benso immediately to attend the burial. He was there for two weeks. Upon his return at night he found ‘Eso & Sons’ premises closed and sealed. The neon lights that had graced the place had gone dead. There was no light even in Esole’s quarters. Beri knocked at the gate and a sullen and devastated Esole woke up to open the gate. He welcomed Beri outside and allowed him move to his section of the establishment without a word. He however felt an inkling of relief in his distressed soul. Beri knew from the looks of his master that there was something wrong, very wrong. So, he did not bother whether he received him cordially or not. In the morning he asked him what was wrong.

“Some cranky uncouth fellows who call themselves tax controllers came here and said I have been operating my businesses for three years illegally. I showed them the licenses and on trying to explain to them that in spite of numerous appeals to the appropriate quarters for tax assessment, the authorities had not turned up, the fools said the documents were faked. They added that I could not have been operating three businesses in the same premises with only two licenses. The fellows were so arrogant, so boorish that we picked up a quarrel. They then sealed the premises and left.”

“They left without giving a condition? They didn’t ask for something you would give them?”

“I tell you, I have never seen a pack of fools with such haughtiness in my life. I gave them a telling off. Stupid! Such marauding thieves should not be allowed in our society. Can you imagine boys who have never seen the walls of a university coming to molest me?”

“They did not come to molest you at the university. They did not come to ask for continuous assessment marks. They came to molest you at their exclusive zone. What did they demand?”

“They gave me a default bill of FCFA 20,000,000 for a business whose capital is less than FCFA 10,000,000 and one of them shamelessly suggested that we could share the amount – that is I give them FCFA 10,000,000 and I remain with FCFA 10,000,000.”

“Because of that you picked up a quarrel with them? You should have negotiated rather than pick up a quarrel. Where do you say they came from?”

“From Tumba.”

“And you think they came here on their own? They did not. They were led into these premises by people around. Give me FCFA 5,000,000. I will leave for Tumba now. That matter should be pursued now that records have not been made. If records are established, you will have to pay the amount or close the business. The tax is so high because of the cocoa business I advised you not to include and make prominent in the licence. I will go to Tumba now.”

“To go and bribe those fools?”

“Yes, it is better to bribe them now before they establish records. They usually wait for two weeks before they establish documents. Once records are established, there is nothing they can do.”

“OK. Here with FCFA 5,000,000.”

Beri got the money and went to the SDO first.

“Please Sir, my master has sent me to you to tell you that he was sorry because he could not return to you after the car incident. He said that the incident aggrieved him

and made him sick. Because of that, he wanted to go to Dande to rest. He added that I should give you this small parcel to help you entertain strangers during the National Day celebrations. He said since his business has been sealed by controllers of taxes, he would have no reason to return before or during the event.”

The SDO took the parcel and went into his room to see. He counted FCFA 1,000,000.

“Does your master know the role he plays in this community? His absence would compromise the celebrations of the National Day. His absence will be felt by the community. He has to be here to animate the National Day. There is no gainsaying. Thank him for me and tell him that he should have come to see me when the controllers came. However, I’ll see what I can do.”

Beri left the SDO and went and saw the Commissioner of Police and the Commandant of the Gendarmerie respectively. He gave each of them FCFA 500,000 with the same message as that of the SDO. They thanked Esole for his kindness and offered to give him a helping hand in his bid to have the business reopened. Beri then proceeded to Tumba where he gave the Director of Taxes FCFA 1,000,000 and the Controller, FCFA 500,000. He then returned to Tonye big, really big with a broad smile. As he got near the establishment, he heard what seemed to be a discordant conversation. He decided to eavesdrop on the conversation. It was a monologue.

“Stupid fools, bastards, uncouth brats want to frustrate me. Uncircumcised rogues. The testicles of this grasping regime trail and try to upset me wherever I go. I am going to see. FCFA 5,000,000 lost into the hands of primitive fellows. I am going to see. I’m going to deal with them. Fools. This government must be overthrown peacefully or violently. I’ll do everything in my power to see it fall. Stupid, fools, shit...”

Beri coughed to announce his return. Esole stopped talking, and doubted whether Beri had heard him talking alone, and what he would think of it.

“Beri do you remember that you once told me that your people resist this kleptocracy? Why is it that you are succumbing to it now? Your going to bribe those bastards is tantamount to your condescending – condoning evil.”

“Please Sir, this regime cannot destroy our resolve to survive as a group. We are solid. But as individuals, we cannot resist. You, as an individual cannot either.”

“I think my best bet is going to live in my farm. I don’t want to be in contact with any aspect of this government.”

“Then you’ll have to go abroad. So long as you are in this country, there is no escape.”

Esole thought he had a death knell.

Chapter Seventeen

Next morning, the controller came from Tumba and broke the seal and gave Esole a six months probation period. Esole reopened the gates of his businesses with suppressed happiness. On the National Day he bagged FCFA 2,600,000 net interest.

“Beri, you are wonderful. We are gradually regaining what we lost in the hands of those fools.”

“That is business. In a few weeks we shall do so. So, you see, lion eat goat, goat eat grass.”

“That’s bad philosophy.”

“Bad, but it works.”

“It works but it must be discouraged.”

“Perhaps when God will decide to recreate the world.”

“Beri, it seems you are dipped in corruption. You don’t seem to care anything about it.”

“Please Sir, I care much about corruption. Corruption is like a wound on the forehead. The patient can’t hide it in the same way as a leopard can’t hide its black spots. Neither can the patient say they hate it. They can’t because they have no choice. They just have to accommodate it as the leopard does its black spots.”

“What are you saying? You suggest that we live with corruption and do nothing about it?”

“Corruption is part and parcel of us. It is fashioned by the top brass of our society and filters downward in degrees of sophistication. So, it is among the top brass, the middle class and the downtrodden of Ewawan society. In fact, the top brass are giving it a whitewashed touch, a hypocritical phase, a phase with the smile of a guillotine. It is worse among the downtrodden because it involves survival.”

“So if the top brass is corrupt everybody else must be corrupt?”

“Sir, do you forget that where the needle passes there the thread passes? Can water be clean downstream when there is a flood upstream?”

“Why not? Have you never heard of sedimentation and self- filtration?”

“The process of sedimentation and self-filtration covers unbelievable distances – too long to be of any significance in what we are discussing. Corruption is not only in Ewawa. It is everywhere. The difference between corruption in Ewawa and elsewhere is that in Ewawa, it is total. Everybody is adjusting themselves in it because there is no way out.”

“I think you are over generalizing corruption in our country. You seem not to endow anybody with a degree of goodness.”

“The only people one would have thought would be exemplary are even worse. Go to the churches and see how church authorities handle alms and thanksgiving money. Money given to the Almighty God, the omnipotent, omniscience, omnipresent in His sanctuary is time and again reported missing, missing, in the millions of francs CFA, missing in the hands of those who of their own accord were ordained or dedicated servants of the Most High. Now ask yourself whether the handlers of such money have ever heard of the story of Ananias and Sapphira. The two sold their own property and withheld some of the money, that is, they refused to give all of it to the church as per their original pledge. By so doing, they indirectly stole some of the money. And for that reason they were cursed and suffered death. People can say that was in the days of the old or primitive church. Even if it were, why should church authorities of the modern church swindle money they know has the potential of inflicting curses and death? It is because

greed or self-interest propels them beyond the realm of fear. It makes them Lucifer incarnate and they challenge God by swindling the money given to Him in His presence and in His sanctuary. Can you imagine that?"

"Beri, you surprise me. It seems as if you have pug-nosed in every field. Have you ever been a catechist?"

"One need not be a catechist to know what is happening in the churches these days. Church authorities know the modern church is impotent. Everybody goes to church not for the soul but for the body. And since the body places self-interest first they break the ethics, the *raison d'être* of the church. When the ancient church asked its founder to teach them how to pray, He taught them to pray in the plural – **Our** father ... give **us our** ...forgive **us our**...as **we** forgive **those**...**us** and....**us** etc. But today the modern church has moved from that collective whole (the beauty of plurality) to individuality (the ugliness of singularity), from **we** to **I**. – **My** father who art ...give **me my** dailyforgive **me** etc. So you see, self-interest overshadows collective interest and that is it. There is no way out."

"Why shouldn't there be a way out? The population should fight its way out of it. Corruption kills the country."

"Sir, it was in the third year of my working in the Administrative Garage that the nosedive into this catastrophic moral and economic decadence started. I think it was in 1984. By 1989 things were getting to a head. Capital flight, arson and immorality were having a toll on the population. The common man was helpless. When students started rioting at the university, people thought that would bring down the government."

"You need not tell me about the university. I was there and I know what happened. You tend to delve into things you don't know."

"Sir, you can't say you know about the university more than I know. You were there but you were like a submerged boulder that knows no season."

"So you claim to know more about the university than I know?"

"Yes of course. The Central Bureau of Investigation relied on the Administrative Garage, and the Central Prison for the insight of what was happening in Ewawa."

"I never knew that. So, you of the Administrative Garage were an arm of the Central Bureau of Information."

"I would say yes without blinking. And I am ashamed to say that whatever situation Ewawa is undergoing today should be blamed on the nonchalance of university professors, especially the ex-seminarians."

"Aren't you venturing into unprovoked defamation and slander?"

"You may look at it that way. But see, most of our Ministers who failed woefully were ex-seminarians who became university professors and later were appointed Ministers."

"What had ex-seminarians turned professors got to do?"

"It had to. A person who nosedives, that is, fails in an institution founded on morals can't succeed elsewhere, especially where morals are the catalyst".

"You might have been aggrieved by missionaries when you were in mission schools. You sound revengeful."

"Not so. Not at all. I am just relating facts. When things started going out of control in Ewawa, people thought the University would salvage them from the mess."

"How could the university do that? It was not a political party. It does not engage in politics."

"It may be it is only in Ewawa that the university does not engage in politics. In other countries universities bring down bad governments. And I can cite several countries in Africa where universities salvaged the population from bad governance."

"I know. I know that in some cases, uncouth and misguided students exposed themselves to the bullets of law enforcement forces. You can't call such bloodshed salvaging the population from bad governance."

“In a stalemate, there is no choice. Universities step in when bad governments render the opposition impotent. When that happened in Ewawa, everybody thought the university, the brain centre of the country, would counter with strikes and demonstrations and finally lead to the fall of the regime. Students started rioting and demonstrating. But they lacked solid leadership. They needed the support of their professors. But what happened? When the professors found that the institutions of the nation were being privatized to those who headed them, they became complacent and nonchalant about the decadence. Each prayed to be appointed head of an institution and thus own it. And truly, most, especially ex-seminarians were appointed Ministers. Others were made heads of large corporations. But did they live up to expectation? No. They messed up even the university itself when they started being appointed chancellors and later on rectors. When the university was headed by civil administrators there was mutual respect between the administrator and the professors. Professors were paid what they were due. But once professors took over the administration of the university on clannish basis, mutual respect vanished, tyranny and misappropriation set in”.

“That sounds farfetched.”

“Those are facts of the bitter truth. When I was working at the Administrative Garage one Parliamentarian asked me to take him to a chicken-parlour. I took him to one at Elig-Fouda. There we met some professors of your university drinking and conversing. They discussed the demerits of the government. They said the government never made use of the university because Directors, Secretaries General and Ministers thought if they asked the university to carry out research on issues of national interest, their positions would be undermined. A geography professor pointed out that after the government had made several expensive and futile attempts to carry out a credible census, his Department

presented a less expensive and more feasible project. The project was studied by several committees and approved. But because the Department did not incorporate members of the Ministry into it, the project was turned down. "How can a government carry out development projects when it does not know its demography and its distribution?" the professor asked. Another professor said there was a difference between theoretical economic growth and practical economic growth. A government may realize economic growth but if that is not backed up with good governance, the ordinary man would not realize the growth. He exemplified that with, "Suppose a country realizes a growth of 2% and the government allows its Ministers to embezzle the 2%, the ordinary man would be as miserable as ever. But if the government invested the 2% in road infrastructure and other facilities, the common man would realize the growth without being told." Every day, our government talks of economic growth, yet the roads remain impassable and medical facilities as unreachable to the common man as ever before. Why? Because the government condones misappropriation of public funds. But do you know what? I was scandalized when I heard the very professors send motions of support to the Head of State when he unilaterally amended the constitution of the country by extending the Presidential tenure of office from five to seven years. Can you imagine what that means in terms of the man behind the mask? Isn't it shameful to note that no professor overtly belongs to an opposition party in this country in spite of what they know about the ruling party? The university has failed to be the light of the nation. Professors have abandoned their intellectual and moral obligations toward the nation. They abandoned poor demonstrating students to the Chancellor's police might. And once he crushed the students, he turned his forces on them."

“Beri, I still doubt your competence in discussing university issues. I think I have an edge over you. I was at the university and I know what went on there.”

“Sir, I don’t think you are knowledgeable of the happenings at the university. Do you know why professor Desua died? You don’t know. But let me tell you, if professors knew, they would have at least made noise. When professor Desua collapsed in class, that is, in active service, his family asked for immediate evacuation to Britain because of the constitutional provision for such cases. His doctor horridly prepared evacuation papers and forwarded them to the Ministry of Health. The Ministry first complained of place of evacuation. The doctor rectified and put Paris. At that time, the 94 year old father of the Minister of Higher Education and first cousin to the Minister of Health suffering from diabetes was also critically ill. The Minister phoned his colleague the Minister of Health and pleaded that his father be evacuated to Germany. The Minister of Health got the rectified version of professor Desua’s doctor’s request and the Minister’s phone call almost at the same time. He turned down that of professor Desua, a civil servant, and approved that of the father of his colleague, a non-civil servant. Can you imagine that! And of course, the 94 year old fellow died in the plane shortly after takeoff. And professor Desua died three weeks later. You see? You see how things work in Ewawa? If you say you were knowledgeable, can you tell me why Mvondokabi, a Senior Lecturer outflanked full-fledged professors to become Chancellor over them?”

“No, no, no, you see, you are delving into what you don’t know. Professors have qualifications, non-negotiable qualifications, qualifications that situate them in terms of academic standing, salaries, and duration in service. That means, qualifications operate within the teaching corps not administrative corps. Qualifications belong to them but appointments belong to the administration.”

“That is the squint eye view of the situation. Let me tell you what happened because I know, you don’t know. When Mvondokabi found out that the Chancellor was rational in handing student riots, he went and betrayed him to the Secretary General at the Presidency. He accused him of being weak and compromising and if that continued, the enemy would take the upper hand at the university. And if that happened, the government would be overthrown. He said if he were appointed Chancellor he would suppress the rioting within a week. He blamed the rioting on people of the ninth Province – diehard opposition. The SG presented the matter to the Head of State and recommended Mvondokabi for the post. The Head of State did not hesitate. The next day he appointed Mvondokabi Chancellor of the university and once in power, he unleashed unprecedented savagery on the university population. He crushed the demonstrating students, dismantled the workers’ union, and turned his attention on the professors. To do that effectively, he had to elevate his professional status. He had to be raised to at least an Associate Professor. So, he convened the first and last University Council under his tenure of office as Chancellor. He had himself promoted and then slammed the door of University Councils.”

“Where did you get all that Beri? You talk as if you were at the University.”

“I have told you, if you want to be informed, work in the Administrative Garage.”

“Let’s leave the university. Tell me Beri, can you be corrupted?”

“Sir, he who attends a pudding-eating occasion does not return with a dirty index finger. If somebody can receive bribe from me, I see no reason why I should not receive from somebody else. The Bible has no say in that.”

“Beri, you surprise me. Let me ask you, have you ever taken a bribe?”

“It depends on what you call a bribe. A bribe is a favour that seeks reciprocated favour. A prayer is a bribe.”

“That is blasphemy.”

“Please Sir, your view of the world is rather puzzling me. I can’t understand you. You tend to see things with the wrong lenses. You seem to be concerned with collective interest first. There is nothing like that. Even identical twins know that self-interest is first. Give them food to feed themselves and you will be surprised by the degree of self interest they exhibit against each other.”

“Have you ever cheated me?”

“Yes, because you also cheat me. What you call cheating is, going an extra mile in exploitation – asking me to do undefined work, work that would not have been envisaged in the course of writing our contract, if it had been written.”

“Can you tell me cases in which this has happened?”

“I don’t know why you are dwelling on something that is as natural as breathing. You send me on unpaid missions. I don’t return empty handed, I live on the proceeds.”

“You live on the proceeds of unpaid missions? How do you do that?”

“That’s a lesson that requires school fee. I know you are not ready to pay school fee now. Are you?”

“We are conversing on corruption. I want to know cases where I have cheated you and you have in one way or another blackmailed me.”

“Let me illustrate that with my best experience elsewhere. When I was working in the Administrative Garage and Parliamentarians made us exchange their old car engines with brand new car engines, we created an accident brigade. Whenever we heard that an old government vehicle had an accident, we rushed there and replaced its number plate with that of a brand new vehicle of the same make. Then we sold the brand new vehicle as scrap. In most cases one of us with ready cash bought it. That was our way of surviving. That is what Parliamentarians had taught us to

do. People invent ways of surviving in a country like this. They describe that as, 'A goat eats where it is tethered'. See, the computer analysts in the Department of Salaries in the Ministry of Finance are pretty rich. They are rich because they have learnt to do as the Minister does. Instead of complaining, they act. When the Minister asks them to transfer billions of francs to his bank accounts abroad, they transfer hundreds of millions to their bank accounts spread all over the country. Every month each of them prepares about ten pay vouchers in his or her name and sends them to his or her bank accounts spread in all the major towns – Tumba, Timbe, Tuada, Elia, Dande, Bassam, Menda, etc. At the end of the month, they ask for paid missions and move from bank to bank harvesting their ingenuity. And after bagging all the money, they return to Dande and delete the amounts from the computer memory. So, they also live and live well. Now look at it this way also, we elect people into Parliament. They ameliorate their own incomes in the heart of economic crises. They don't think of the common man. Government gives contracts to build roads. They use their positions and take the contracts instead of giving them to trained contractors. And what do they do? Instead of carrying out the work, they get caterpillars and clear the roads, making no gutters, no culverts. Rain falls and washes the mud, creating potholes and making it impossible for farm to market vehicles to ply the roads. The consequences are that, basic commodities become expensive. What does the common man do in such cases? Sit there and pray? Sit there and complain? Who listens to that bullshit called complaint? No body. The sharp common man does not sit there with a rosary in hand praying. He adjusts himself in the tangle. By this I mean, he struggles to live no matter how indecently."

"Beri, you frighten me. I thought you were an innocent boy one could trust."

“And so you’ll not trust me anymore? Sir, I love you. You pay me punctually. You have taken me as your son and I have taken you as my father. But look at it this way. I come from a very competitive area, an area that has no regards for orphans. We don’t have the word orphan. Everybody is an orphan from birth. By this I mean, we expect everybody who has physically survived childhood to ply his way into the sphere of influence. They should evolve into respectable persons no matter their backgrounds. When we go out of our tribe, as I am out here, it is not child’s play. Even if it is cigarettes that I sell I must be able to build a bungalow at home. Do you know that I have 7 taxis out there? We live hard, really hard.”

“You live hard in cheating, in bribing, in corruption!”

“Whatever you call it. But we are not half as bad as the ruling clans. We work hard to live, they steal hard to live. Furthermore, who really steals? Have you seen a bag of cement? What is written on it? 50 Kg. Weigh it. 45 Kg. See a bag of rice, 50Kg. Weigh it. 45 Kg. See a bottle of gaz. It is half full. Go to the petrol station and buy petrol for ten thousand francs. The petrol pump figures race to FCFA 10,000. And you think you have been served with petrol worth ten thousand francs? What crocodile tears! And that is it. Has the common man time to weigh cement and rice and gaz before he buys them? When government price controllers raid the markets what weights and prices do they control? By the end of the control exercise look into their pockets and ask yourself whether they controlled anything at all for the good of the common man. When they hark at the common man should he remain there reading the Bible?”

“Once more it boils down to this murky government – a nonchalant, non-committed government, a government that must be changed.”

"There again you are mistaking the situation. You are taking the change as something that should be spearheaded by an individual. Prompt change in this country requires concerted action else, we should allow nature take its course."

"Allow nature take its course! How long will that be when the best medical facilities impede nature's course? When planes with damaged landing-gears- land safely?"

"What else can the ordinary man say?"

"Beri can you tell me your level of education?"

"Level of education is not important here. It is the **art** of living that is important here."

"The **science** of living, you mean?"

"No. Not the **science** of living. The **art** of living. **Science** is too straightforward. It deals with straight lines and right angles, the pluses, the minuses and the equals to. There is nothing like fixed equals to in the **art** of living. **Art** deals with curves and circles and abstractions like beauty and ugliness which have no standard measurements. **Art** doesn't care about the logic of equals to. For example, education is equals to influence, wealth or any other such daydreaming does not exist in the **art** of living. In like manner, illiteracy is equals to poverty, misery and all that bullshit does not exist in the logic of the **art** of living. That is why people who stack diplomas in shelves as women stack firewood in bans, especially those who fail to get into positions of influence, are worse off in this system. They nag and nag about as if, if they had gotten to positions of influence they would not have done what they condemn in other people. Look at the top brass of our country, the least educated person holds a Masters' degree."

"Beri, I believe you are becoming insolent."

"Sir, not insolent but blunt. Blunt to the bitter truth. I did Sociology at Ecole Normale but abandoned teaching when salaries were sliced. I couldn't find myself earning

FCFA 75,000 a month. So, I took onto driving my own taxi myself instead of giving it to someone who would turn it into a joint-stock business. I made FCFA 15,000 net profit a day. When my uncle proposed the Administrative Garage job, I found it more lucrative, so I got it. As the country gradually collapsed and things worsened and the garage was closed, I took onto selling cigarettes. I earned thrice the salary of a teacher. My friends who remained in the teaching field complaining and organizing strikes and insulting the government are beggars today. By the end of the month, they borrow twice what they earn. People shun meagre jobs like cigarette selling but if you know what it entails you will prefer it to teaching. A trained cigarette seller can make as much as FCFA 400,000 a month. It is big business. But one should be smart and tactful. It is brisk.”

“Pfuuuuuuuuuuuu. No doubt. And that is what this sterile government has made of the Ewawa teacher – an object of scorn and derision by nincompoops,” Esole said in his heart and sighed.

Chapter Eighteen

Beri's insights into corruption surprised Esole. But the truth was that they were so practical and problem-solving that he half admired and half condemned him in his mind. All in all, he had never had a boy like him and he prayed that he would be blessed with his services for a long time. Eso & Sons Enterprises and the farm at Nidong under his supervision were working well. Money came in, real hard cash, making him forget the miserable days at the university. Even his bitter experiences with the POSB were gradually dissipating in his mind. The future glowed with hope. But one day, Beri announced his return to Benso.

"Please Sir, I shall return to Benso in two weeks. I have received a letter saying that after the celebration of my father's death next year, I shall take over his chair. I shall be his successor. I feel bad about it but I can't help. Our culture is strict when it comes to inheriting one's father's chair. So, there is nothing that can hold me back."

"That is a death knell on me. It would be difficult to fill the vacuum you would leave behind. Though we had opposing world views on a number of things, I had to rely on your insightfulness to solve biting problems. Anyway, I wish you luck and I believe all will be well with you."

"Thank you very much. You see, I am unprepared for this return to the village. My father's seat in our traditional council is higher than that of our renowned Professor Benlon's father's seat, but because he was a Minister and built a FCFA 60,000,000 house at home, his father's chair tended to dwarf that of my father. So I aimed at building a

FCFA 90,000,000 house and regain our lost prestige. That was my ambition. Now, I shall be returning to Benso with only FCFA 90,000,000 in my pocket. With that, I can only build what would look like a kitchen if I should have something left to give me breakfast for a few months. I am particularly thankful to you for making me grow into a man, a man of substance.”

Esole could not believe his ears. Beri had FCFA 90,000,000 to take home and build a house. Where did he take the money? There should be something sinister in the world of money-making.

“Do you say you can’t build a house with FCFA 90,000,000?”

I believe with FCFA 60,000,000 and personal supervision of the work, I shall build a more imposing building. Government contractors always overvalue building materials. They overpriced Benlon’s building. I believe I shall be comfortable.”

“Beri, you have all along been my master. You would have been the one to employ me and not the other way round. You have surprised me.”

“An employer is one who seeks the services of an employee. That does not mean that the employer is necessarily richer than the employee. So long as you needed my serves to vamp up your ego, and I needed your salary to build up my savings, our relationship remained logical.”

“Illogical you mean. Do you know all my assets here do not get up to FCFA 30,000,000?”

“It does not matter. You are better known in this vicinity than the person with FCFA 90,000,000 in his pocket.

“Beri, I would have liked to have you here in the days ahead when I would be making a dare-the-devil venture into politics again. This time, I believe things will change because of my financial might and the reality of our country. I believe the population is so aggrieved nowadays that they can’t go in for lies anymore. I believe the Minister will have it rough this time.”

“You are still dreaming of dabbling with politics? You once told me that your people say, ‘A second foraging kills the partridge’. You had suffered the loss of the first elections. You had the consequences in terms of time lost, money lost and status lost. You are pretty rich now. I would have expected you to say you would send for your wife to come and enjoy your new found wealth with you. There is nothing you can’t do now. Everybody around respects you. You are the talk of the day. If you go back to politics you would expose yourself to ridicule. Don’t you remember the degrading newspaper captions of your last lost elections?”

“This country must change. The rulers of this country must be brought to their knees. Enough is enough. The population cannot be mortgaged to uncouth plunderers of public funds. They must be brought to justice.”

“Sir, that is the wrong premise again. You don’t go into politics to salvage the world from its calamities. You get into politics for personal gain. I have told you this again and again. You see, politics in Africa is different from politics in Europe. Europeans and Americans get into politics to have their names written in gold in history books. They get into politics when they have something to offer. And once they achieve their aims, they quit. But look at the African scene. Apart from Nyerere, Senghor and Mandela, is there any other Head of State who has willingly relinquished power? Eighty eight year old African Heads of State dye their hair black to look young. Those who get bald wear wigs for the same purpose. Those who look frail because they are anaemic go to Europe or America for blood transfusion. Do you think people who cannot present the true picture of their physical persons can present the true picture of their moral persons? So why waste your time and money in politics. Politics will frustrate and rob you of your money and honour.”

“That is the more reason why the fight to right things must be relentless. A few people must sacrifice themselves to correct what is wrong.”

“That would have been OK if it were feasible. Because it is not possible, the best thing to do is to write it off. Right now, there are two huddles. If you right things at the level of contestants, what will you do at the level of the electorates? The African electorate is self-deluding, downright stupid and not worthy of one’s sacrifice. The very people you think you are going to redeem will be the people who will betray you. My advice is, don’t go and lose your hard earned wealth in politics. You left that cursed and degrading profession called teaching and accidentally bumped into money-making business. You better stay there and watch the country waste away.”

“Waste away! When the country wastes away, everything wastes away. Wealth loses its value. So, it is better to see the country forge ahead than see it move backward with a few rich people lording it over the poor.”

“That would have been ideal. But because it is not, we should dance according to the drum beat. Ninety nine point nine, nine percent of the world works, serves and adores money, no matter how it is gotten. The world respects and adores a rich illiterate than a poor genius. Ninety nine point nine, nine percent of the poor would rather attend the funeral of a wicked rich person than that of a righteous colleague. That is it and there is nothing we can do about it. Nowadays, it is easier for a non-Christian rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Judged from the number of requiem masses offered for deceased rich Christians/non-Christians, the calibre and numbers of the clergy that celebrate their requiem masses, the lay population that attends such masses and the wonderful testimonies given, there is no doubt that the rich are highly esteemed on earth. And of course, the clergy

that celebrate requiem masses for them are the cream who when they tie anything on earth, the thing must be tied in heaven, and when they lose anything on earth, the thing must be loose in heaven. You are now pretty rich and your comfort on earth and eternal life in heaven are assured. What else do you want? Stay that way. I pray, stay that way. You have got the key to enjoyable life.”

“That is frank talk. But e, e, e, e. Anyway I shall try to resist.”

“Please Sir, don’t say you will try to resist. Swear right now that from now, you will never dream of politics anymore. The African situation is pitiful, very pitiful. Africa went through two devastating, agonizing and humiliating historical events – the slave trade and colonization. African politics would have been forged or moulded on reversing the two events. African leaders would have focused on righting the past, wiping off the shame and degradation. They would have proven to the world that Africa would have developed on her own but for the plunder and exploitation she was subjected to by foreign forces. But what did they do when they took power? They recycled slavery and colonialism and gave them new phases. In the guise of nationalism they invented protectionist political theories which they use to justify not only their tyranny but also their indefinite tenures of office. Of course this creates no space for the opposition and the unemployed youth. In a bid to find space under the sun, they flee to the West where they do work that is not commensurate with their education. Derided and spited by their hosts, hunger forces them to forage in garbage heaps gathering junk, catering for abandoned old white folks, and washing corpses in mortuaries. And in the end, they are more humiliated than the once upon a time slave. Illegal immigrations or what the children themselves call ‘bush falling’ is the most disgusting experience Africa is going through right now. Why

do the children call it 'bush-falling'? Bush-falling means, circumventing conventions in the acquisition of travel documents on the one hand, and doing the same in the manner of travelling to the West by air, sea and land. Since circumvention presupposes confrontation with the law, for the circumventors to avoid the law, they dash into the wild forests, stormy seas and hell-hot deserts to go to the West; hence the term bush-falling. You see, bush-falling is a more taunting stigma than the once upon a time slave trade. But do African leaders care about it? Does it mean anything to them when they see hundreds of corpses of their citizens being dragged from the sea every other day? No. They don't. So long as illegal immigrations reduce the number of jobless graduates in their countries and lessen the possibilities of rebellion against them, they don't care. And that is it."

"Thank you Beri. I shall think things over. Your advice is mature and very enlightening."

Two weeks later, Esole went and escorted Beri at the park. It was a painful separation. They both knew that unbridgeable social and geographical distances were separating them. When Esole raised his hand to bid Beri bye, bye, he felt a lump of hard spittle block his throat. Emotions choked him. He whispered bye, bye and drove off spiritlessly.

Chapter Nineteen

Four months after the departure of Beri, Esole thought it was time for him to put Beri behind him. One afternoon, he decided to tour neighbouring villages to see their commercial potentials. Since he did not know how far he would go, he thought of having enough petrol. So he went to a petrol station. He brought out FCFA 10,000 and asked the petrol boy to give him petrol for the amount. The boy said they had run out of petrol. Esole got the money and put it in the purse containing his vehicle documents and placed the purse on the chair as he drove to another petrol station. But before he got there, he met a police control.

“Pierce” the police demanded.

Esole got the purse and gave them. The police man took the purse, opened it and saw the money. He grimaced as if a very important document was not legible. He went behind the vehicle, peered at the vehicle number plate and tended to compare it with that of the *carte grise*. Then he came forth and with the sinister smile of a guillotine returned the purse with military salute to Esole. He took it without thought and drove off to the next petrol station a distance away. He asked for FCFA 10,000 worth of petrol. When the petrol was served, he opened the purse and to his shock, there was no money for him to pay for the petrol. His mind flashed back. He remembered that he had put the money in the purse and had given the purse to the police with the money in it. He dashed back to the police check point to confront the police man. There was no sign of a police man in the vicinity. Esole got back to the petrol station and narrated his story, cursing and swearing.

“*Ogab!*” the owner of the petrol station addressed him “I can’t say you were careless. What I can say is that you had a slip of the mind and the police man took advantage of it. Nobody gives the police a bribe of FCFA 10,000 FCFA 1,000 is sufficient even in a case of car theft. The police knew that it was a mistake and that is why they disappeared once you left. Just leave your identity card with the boys and go for the money.”

As Esole drove home to get the money he cursed and insulted the police and promised that, that nonsense would stop once he entered Parliament. He would insist on passing a bill that only boys of proven character would be recommended to enter the police force, not brats from the same region of the country. He got home, got the money and went and retrieved his identity card. He felt really hurt and thought of making a scandal of the incident. When he got home, he wrote protests to the Commissioner of police, the SDO, and a couple of news papers. The next day, to the dismay of the Commissioner, the papers carried the news on front pages. The Commissioner was so embarrassed that he set up a commission of enquiry. From assignment records the police officers who were sent to the place were got and disciplined. To clear the name of the police station, the Commissioner called the press to witness the sanctioning of the culprits.

The next day, the papers carried the news of the sanctions meted on the police. Esole was highly delighted and thought fighting malpractices was a war that had to be won in Ewawa. He remembered with cinematographic precision, his daughter’s demise at the Airport, his wife’s migration, and his loss of FCFA 5,000,000 to the Private Secretary of the Director of salaries. Beri’s advice was strong, truthful and wise. But then, why in the name of goodness should embezzlement be allowed to sweep through this land like a hurricane in the Caribbean?

Esole examined himself in the mirror of time. He was an accomplished intellectual. In other countries, he would have been a consultant. He was on retirement but not tired. He had taught most of the policy makers of the country. He doubted why he was not in the mainstream of decision making.

“I see no reason why I should be engaged in doughnut business that every Dick and Harry can do? Decision-making is the reserve of men that matter. I am a man that matters. I can’t lease out this wonderful country to embezzlers, whether they are Heads of States, Ministers, Police and House- helps who accumulate FCFA 90,000,000 out of no tangible work. There is something seriously wrong with this country,” he said to himself.

“Ngwa,” he called the boy with whom he had replaced Beri. “Tell Mukete and Ekinde to get ready for a maiden trip to West Bassiland. It would be a path-finding trip. The figures of the last elections show that West Bassiland is thickly populated and should be given maximum attention.”

Ngwa got everything set. But, for the next three days, a terrible and devastating storm swept over the land. The rains had set in earlier than expected and they were so torrential that nobody ventured out. On the third day, there was a manageable drizzle.

Esole set out for his first trip to Nidong, the Headquarters of West Bassiland. Nidong is twenty three kilometres from Tonye. Of the twenty three kilometres, only four could be considered a traceable track, a track that was cleared and perhaps used by vehicles once in a blue moon. And of course, the four kilometres were on the Tonye side of the border. So, after covering only four kilometres, Esole and his workers got to the border between Lebmot and Tonye Sub-Divisions.

The track on the Lebmot side was virtually impassable. The only vehicle that had plied it before that day was Beri’s. And since he left, no other vehicle had ventured. The three

day non-stop storm had worsened matters. It had interwoven the overgrown elephant grass with fallen tree branches leaving no traces of the wheel-tracks of Beri's vehicle. Although Ngwa was driving the same vehicle on that trip, he did not know the road and did not have the experience Beri had.

Esole had confidence the vehicle would make it considering the ease with which Beri went to and returned from Nidong. So he urged Ngwa to go on. It was the dare the devil trip. The vehicle lumbered and bashed, and rasped, and growled as it tore through the entangled undergrowth. At last, it got to Kole village, the first village and of course, a village of convergence in West Bassiland. There they stopped to cool down the engine.

The villagers rushed to see the vehicle. They shouted, "Beri, Beri, Beri has come." Children jumped at the vehicle, some elders admired it in mute consternation and others exclaimed, "O! The vehicle is one day too late. If it had come yesterday! O! Had it come yesterday!" They were referring to a sad incident the day before. A child had swallowed the cover of a beer bottle and it had stuck in his throat. In trying to take him to Tumba by head-load for medical intervention, he died on the way.

Ngwa put water in the radiator and they set off again. They drove through treacherous land. About two kilometres to Nekom, the vehicle took a sudden jolt and skipped. Esole hit his head against the roof of the cabin and felt excruciating pains in his neck. A billion stars raced in his eyes. He yelled and cursed, "Is this the road that leads to where people vote massively for the government? Are these bastards aware of their fate?"

Esole was so angry that when they finally got to his farm, he had no interest going round to see how the farm looked like. The supervisor of work took Ngwa and the other boys round and showed them the great potentials of the farm.

Esole had his neck massaged. By the time the supervisor returned with the boys, Esole had manageable relief and asked the boys to return to Tonye with him. He was grim, sunken and calculative.

Chapter Twenty

It was about mid afternoon when they set out to return. The boys conversed about the farm and opted to work there. They gave the virtues of farming. They praised their master for choosing to be a farmer. They praised Nidong and its environs. All such talk slashed through Esole's heart with the savagery of a cutting knife. He remained mute as the vehicle wallowed, skipped and rocked from one pothole to another. They soon got to Nekom, a village about twenty kilometres to Tonye. There they met a very sad situation. The lone son of the chief had been missing since morning and around late afternoon, it was discovered that he had fallen from a palm tree early in the morning around the time Esole and his boys had past bye. The fellow was discovered struggling with his life under the palm tree just an hour or so, before their return. The villagers were helpless. No villager could touch him for fear of carrying the misfortunes associated with violent deaths should the boy die on the day of accident. Only a member of the boy's immediate family could touch him. But none was at home. So, the rest of the villagers stood helpless but very concerned. When they heard the tooting of the vehicle, they rushed forth in full glee.

"Papa," they cried in unison. "Papa, you are sent by God. Please, please, come and help us. The lone son of our chief has fallen from a palm tree and is lying helpless under the tree. His father is not at home. None of his immediate family member is at home. So, we can't help him – we can't touch him. Only strangers can touch him. If you won't mind, we

shall pay your boys to carry him into your vehicle. When we get to Tonye, we shall hire a vehicle to take him to Tumba hospital. We beg you very much. Please!”

“I am sorry. Do you say the boy’s father is not at home?” Esole asked with no concern.

“He is not. Our greatest fear is that the boy may die under the tree. We don’t want him to die under the tree. We don’t want him to die today. If he is carried to hospital and the Doctor sustains his life for a day, and he dies tomorrow or two days later, his death will not be considered a violent death. But if he dies today, and especially under the tree, his death will be taken for a violent death and we shall be bound to carry out a series of expensive purification rituals. Furthermore, our village would lose its status of the village of convergence. People from other villages who come here on Sundays will avoid our village for fear of being contaminated by the misfortunes associated with violent deaths. Please, remove the stigma of violent death from us. Help us carry the boy to Tonye, only Tonye. At Tonye, we shall hire a vehicle to carry him to Tumba. We shall pay you heavily. Please!”

“I can’t help you. You say the boy is bleeding. His blood will stain my vehicle. Furthermore I have to carry firewood at Kole village. I can’t carry a careless stupid boy at the expense of my firewood. Why did he have to climb a palm tree after an all nightlong rain – rain we all know reached all the corners of the earth? Didn’t he know that the trunk of the palm tree would be slippery? That is how you villagers are – always taking risks for very little on-the-spot gain. Where is his father? Is he not administering oath-taking rites today?”

“Please Sir,” the villagers cried in unison. “You are sent by God. You are sent by God. We take God beg you. In the mighty name of Jesus, we beg you. No other vehicle plies this road. The road has suddenly deteriorated. We have never

had it this bad. We don't know how your boys manage it. Beri made real money here. He was our saviour. If he were here, he knows all of us here. He used to sleep in any house here whenever his vehicle broke down. Your vehicle is fantastic. Please, help us. Our chief is a very welcoming and generous person. He will reward you beyond your expectations. Please, help us."

"If your chief had the means of rewarding me he would not have been licking fingers in dirty situations. If he had the means, that is, if he could reason he would not have been selling your consciences. Give me way. I can't carry your intransigent stupid boy and leave my firewood behind. It serves your chief right," Esole said and asked Ngwa to drive off. He took off forcefully, splashing mud on both sides of the road.

Esole's pain had subsided considerably. Ngwa drove hard, really hard and very soon they were at Kole. There at Kole, a large group of villagers gathered in front of a hut. There were frantic movements and whispers, and sighs and suggestions. Old women were frantically picking herbs behind houses. Some were squeezing, others pounding and others examining herbs to ascertain that they were the right ones. Esole's boys requested that they inquire what was wrong.

"It should be the same scenario. The fellows are once more in trouble. If you want stories to tell, one of you can go and find out. Ngwa, let's go and take the firewood," Esole said. Mukete climbed down the vehicle and moved toward the place. The people had heard the revving of the vehicle and were jubilant that God had at last sent them a vehicle. When Mukete got close to the hut and asked what was happening, the villagers responded by asking where his vehicle was. "That is it down there. My master has gone to carry firewood."

“Thank God, let’s go and see him. God has at last sent me a Good Samaritan. Praise be to God Almighty,” one of the men said and dashed out to see Esole.

“Papa. Please Sir, welcome. Welcome. Please Sir, welcome. God has sent you to save me. For two weeks now, no vehicle has passed through this road. No vehicle, not one. The road has deteriorated this year beyond comprehension. The only person who dared it was Beri. Now, it is more than e, eh, eh two, eh, eh months we don’t see him again. This vehicle looks like his. For the past three days my wife has been in labour. She is having a breech birth – with one leg of the child out. It seems as if the child is already dead. Our cry now is to save the life of the mother. We have invited all traditional medicine women specialized in childbirth, but we have failed. But as God is always merciful, he has sent you to help convey my wife to hospital. Thank God, you are my Good Samaritan. Please Sir, let’s put down the firewood. Let’s go and carry her.”

“You have made the worst mistake on earth. I am not a Good Samaritan. I am a Bad Samaritan. What I mean by this is that I can’t carry your wife in my vehicle. She is bleeding and her blood will stain my vehicle. Secondly, I have more value for my firewood than people who have less value for themselves. When people are faced with the problem you are faced with, they become creative. But you sit down praying for Good Samaritans. Please, be ingenious. If you had made a local stretcher, you would have carried your wife to Tonye and would have been in hospital by now. You see, you should learn to be practical. If that woman dies, I shall blame you for not being creative. Stop asking for sympathy. Be ingenious. Quick, quick! Suppose I did not come here, would you have abandoned your wife to die? Come on, get the whole village working. Let them build a stretcher. Quick, quick.”

“Please Sir. Please, I beg you. In the mighty name of Jesus, I beg you. From here to Tonye is twelve kilometres – four to six hours of head-load of very difficult trekking in mud and deep potholes. If one of the carriers slips and falls, that alone would finish the patient. Please, in the mighty name of Jesus, I take God beg you.”

“Boys, get into the vehicle and let’s go. Let that fellow stay there praying to Jesus.”

Chapter Twenty One

The villagers stood gasping in disbelief, completely distraught by what they considered Esole's heartlessness in human suffering. About thirty minutes after he had left, the woman died. Her husband sent his younger brother to Nidong to tell her parents that she had died in childbirth. When the boy got to Nekom, he met a village in suppressed mourning. The chief's son had died about an hour after Esole's departure. Since it was a violent death, no overt manifestation of mourning was allowed. No crying, no sobbing. But when the boy broke the news of the death of his elder brother's wife and the circumstances in which she died, especially when he mentioned Esole's untoward behaviour, the whole village used that as a pretext to cry and wail for the chief's son. The chief's immediate family threw themselves on the ground, wallowed in mud and cried as they had never cried before. As the news spread, all the people of West Bassiland vowed to revenge the deaths of the two loved ones on Esole. They called him, The BS.

The chief's son was buried without ceremony under the palm tree, and for nine days the villagers carried out rituals of purification. Coincidentally, on that day, Esole happened to pass by at the end of the ceremonies on his way to Nidong. He stopped for a brief while to enquire about the boy.

"He died shortly after you had left," an old man responded.

"Sorry. That's too bad," Esole said casually and drove off.

The young men of Nekom got enraged. "That fellow shows no remorse for what he did. He values his vehicle and firewood more than human life. What a heartless fellow! He must pay with his life." Ejole said, entered his house and got a cutlass.

"*A Mue*," Kome called his friend. "We have just gone through excruciating and expensive series of purification rites. I don't want us to get into another violent death that would lead us into other agonizing rites. Leave your cutlass. My suggestion is that, as that man-pass-man has gone to Nidong, he should be made to trek from here to Tonye. He thinks he has a supper vehicle but we should show him that the vehicle cannot solve all his problems. We should make the road impassable even to his vehicle. We should deepen the potholes and put broken bottles and nails in them so that when he gets stuck and accelerates, the nails will puncture the tyres. When that happens, he will be forced to trek. I am sure that a merciless man like that will not have the courage to ask for help from us. That is my suggestion."

"*A Mue*, you are right. That is going to show him pepper. If we do that, he will never forget. Tell all the boys. Let's start deepening the holes. We should not wait. We don't know when he will come back. Let's deepen the holes in front of the chief's compound so that when he gets stuck there, we can jump out and jeer at him."

"No. Our people are too sympathetic and unpredictable. They are too soft-hearted. I want him to get stuck where he will be exposed to insect bites – where nobody will feel guilty for not helping him, where he will have only himself to blame. We must move away from the village. Let's go to the hills midway to Kole village. When we deepen the holes there and he gets stuck, mosquitoes, tsetse flies and midges will feast on him, and that will teach him sense."

With that, all the young men and some elders left for the hills and deepened the holes along a two kilometre stretch of hilly road. On their way home, they sang victory songs.

About half a kilometre from the village they heard the revving of a vehicle. They knew it was The BS. They dived into the forest to avoid his seeing them.

The people of Nekom had deepened the potholes methodically – deep, deeper, deepest, deepest, deeper, deep and so on, along the steepest part of the hill. This made it impossible for Ngwa to predict the appropriate manoeuvring driving skill to apply. In certain potholes, he could not reverse because the exhaust pipe got stuck and blocked against an embankment. In such situations he accelerated hard thus using much force. The smell of burning clutch and overheating suffocated him. After an hour of futile bashing and banging, he ran out of petrol. The workers suggested that they go for petrol at Nekom.

“I think the best thing we can do is to abandon the vehicle here and return to Tonye on foot. That is what these bastards wanted,” Esole said.

“I fear they will burn the vehicle if they know we have abandoned it.”

“That will earn them long terms of imprisonment,” Esole said emphatically and they set off. They got to Tonye completely exhausted. In the morning, they hired a tow jeep and three mechanics and set off for Nekom. Upon arrival, they were stunned with what they saw – the charred remains of the pickup. Esole examined the place and found that it was heavily trampled. He concluded that the vehicle was set ablaze by a mob and not a single person. It was perhaps the whole village or a sizeable group.

“Don’t show any remorse even if the people come back and meet us here to come and admire what they have done,” Esole advised.

They returned as if nothing had happened. As they went, they thought of several ways they would capture the culprits. They thought that the people of Kole who had seen them return without the vehicle the day before, were the main

suspects. When they reached Kole, they studied the way the people moved about. They could decipher from their movements that there was something amiss. So, Esole decided to send detectives to trail the culprits.

On Saturday, Tonye market day, he noticed that the people of Kole and Nekom did not attend the market. He therefore concluded that the two villages connived to burn the vehicle. His complaint to the police was as such graphically worded, providing guidelines for action. In a coordinated police and gendarme raid one morning, the chiefs of the two villages and all their male subjects were picked up and locked up in cells. After a gruesome two-week interrogation, the chief of Nekom and six of his subjects and the chief of Kole and the man whose wife had died, and ten others, were charged with malicious burning of Esole's pickup. The other people were discharged and acquitted. The Commissioner of Police then sent word to the chief of Nidong, that the detained persons could be released on bail.

Chapter Twenty Two

Chief Nkume of Nidong, the paramount chief of West Bassiland took it as a personal challenge. He had been over vexed by the detention of his most loyal sub-chiefs in a filthy cell. He convened an emergency meeting of all the West Bassiland chiefs and urged them to contribute money and hire lawyers to defend their colleagues and their subjects. The chiefs reacted promptly. They bailed out the detainees and hired two lawyers for them.

On the first day of hearing, the population came out massively. The police had been mobilized and there was order. After browsing over papers, the Magistrate read out the summons.

“Chief Esape, chief of Kole village, 1st accused, on the 24th June 2006, you instigated six of your subjects to set Mr. Esole’s vehicle on fire. Are you guilty or not guilty?” the Magistrate asked.

“Not guilty, your worship,” the chief responded. The same question was asked the other defenders. All of them pleaded not guilty and the case was adjourned for a month to give the lawyers time to prepare.

On the day the case resumed, the plaintiff was asked to present his case. He told the court of how he had gone to his farm at Nidong and how on his way back, he was asked to assist in carrying patients to hospital. He said he refused. Then on the 28th June 2006, he went to his farm again and on his way back, his vehicle got stuck in mud. After a futile attempt to drive out, he ran out of petrol and so abandoned

the vehicle in the pothole. Next morning he took a tow jeep and some mechanics to the place. But to his surprise he met the charred remains of his vehicle. He at once suspected the people he had refused to help to carry their patients to hospital. Only they owed him a grudge and could resort to revenge. He said his suspicion was proven right when the Commissioner of police sent detectives to the two villages. The villagers boasted overtly that they burnt the vehicle because of my wickedness. A combined crack force of gendarmes and police was then sent in to arrest the culprits.

“What happened that you did not help the accused to carry their desperate patients to hospital?” the Magistrate asked.

“Because I knew they couldn’t make it to hospital. I predicted they would die on the way. Their ordeal had lasted for too long and carrying them in a vehicle that would bash them around was not the ideal thing to do. I did not explain this to the natives however. I simply told them that the patients were bleeding and their blood would stain my vehicle. I wanted to make them angry and set them asking questions about their situation,” Esole responded.

“Are you so heartless that you value your vehicle more than human life? Can anybody narrate to this court what actually happened?” the Magistrate demanded.

“It is hair-raising, downright unbelievable what we saw that day. Your worship, this man met us in the village with his empty pickup when a young man, the chief’s lone son had fallen from a palm tree and was struggling with his life where he had fallen. We begged him to help carry the boy to hospital. We promised to pay him heavily. He responded that because the boy was bleeding he won’t carry him because his blood would stain his vehicle. Another reason he gave was that he had firewood to carry at Kole village,” *Sango* Etame of Nekom narrated. After his narration, a spokesman from Kole village narrated the story of the

woman with difficult birth and ended by emphasizing that the two patients died because they were not carried to hospital on time. With that, the Magistrate gnashed his teeth and asked the accused to defend themselves.

The lawyer for the accused stood up promptly. "Your worship, if I had my way, I would have asked for another adjournment of this case to give me time to recover from the shock I have got after hearing what the two last speakers have said. I am so shaken with what I have heard that I have lost train of thought. But as I can't lord it over you, Your Worship, I want to tell this honourable court that it is absolutely unacceptable for the plaintiff to scrape old scars. Bringing these natives here is scraping old scars. What does the plaintiff want from these people? He had proven to them beyond human understanding that he was soulless. A man who cannot help a woman in precarious labour has no right to civilized treatment, a man who calls himself a Bad Samaritan, has no right to court hearing, has no right to civil and even military protection and above all, has no right to waste your time in hearing a disgusting case. The plaintiff claims the accused burnt his pickup. How certain is he? Can this honourable court base its judgment on suspicion and manoeuvres of elite police and gendarme crack forces? What do we understand by a crack force? A crack force is of course, a force that extorts information for the sake of pleasing the complainant. What else is a crack force? My suspicion in this matter, Your Worship, is that, the plaintiff's vehicle caught fire from overheat and not what he is imagining. The vehicle got stuck in mud and they over tasked the engine. And of course this happened far away from the two villages and as the plaintiff himself has pointed out it was late in the evening when tired villagers don't venture out. So, no villager knew that the vehicle had got stuck in mud. Furthermore the natives don't have petrol to burn iron."

“Has the lawyer for the plaintiff something to say?” the Magistrate asked.

“Your worship, may I say that we are concerned here with the case of burning a pickup and not the case of the morality of taking patients to hospital. My learned colleague is presenting a different case here and not the case before us. So, let’s examine the case before us and not the one he has put forth. To say that a vehicle that had run out of petrol caught fire on its own in a wet night is to show gross ignorance of natural phenomena. To say that crack forces extort information to please the complainants is to discredit our law enforcement institutions including this honourable court you have the honour to preside over. Of all the statements the accused made, none talked of the extortion of information by torture. So, what the detectives found out is authentic. A crack force is an elite, well trained force, trained to handle situations like the one before us. What the force found out is valid and unquestionable and I would want this court to base its judgment on it. Nobody can doubt that the people of the two villages were aggrieved by the plaintiff’s behaviour. Nobody can doubt that because of that they owed him some grievance. Nobody can doubt that they were influenced by the grievance and took to revenge. This has been proven beyond all reasonable doubts by the instruments of justice our nation has put in place. I therefore expect this honourable court to take the course of justice by declaring the defendants guilty as charged.”

By the time the lawyer for the plaintiff drew his conclusion, many people in court wondered whether the Magistrate was listening to him at all. He sort of got out of a deep reverie, contorted his face and declared in noncommittal manner, “Judgment in two weeks.” The court rose rather anticlimactically. Two weeks later, the judge dismissed the case on grounds that the allegations that the people of Kole and Nekom had burnt the vehicle were unfounded. There were no eyewitnesses.

Chapter Twenty Three

Esale returned from court completely traumatized. He was once again a victim of emotions. For sure, the Magistrate passed the verdict on the bases of the emotional overtones of his refusal to carry patients to hospital not on the facts leading to the villagers burning his pickup. For some time, he behaved funny. He could talk to himself for hours then burst into a series of guffaws and start skipping about. The papers gave wide publicity to his actions and promoted the name The BS. He was referred to as The BS – a once opposition aspirant for the post of MP in Pekuguba Division. The ‘Ewawan Tribune’ carried images of him at the front and back pages. Upon the declaration of the verdict, it captioned the case, “The Opposition Party (SPDP) Candidate For the Parliamentary Seat in Pekuguba Division Loses Again.” The following day it had another caption, “A Soulless MP Aspirant Loses Case.” ‘The Guardian’ gave the captioned, “Retired Professor Abandons Woman in Difficult Labour to Death.” These captions captured the attention of the international press.

The anchor lady of the CNN program ‘Inside Africa’ happened to be returning from South Africa where she had gone to interview Mandela. She had a brief stop in Ewawa and decided to interview ‘The Bad Samaritan’. He welcomed her and made her sit down,

“I’m Imef Eko,” she introduced herself with a broad smile. “I work for the CNN. I want to talk to you. Are you ready to talk to me?” She asked and grimaced.

"You are welcome. I'll talk to you. Perhaps for the first time, I shall have an ideal reporter, a reporter who will tell the world what I stand for.

"You are welcome."

"Your name is Esole, a retired professor, am I right?"

"Yes, you are."

"Papers refer to you as 'The Bad Samaritan', 'The BS, for short. Where does that name come from?"

"I gave myself the name at Kole village where some fellows who had eaten their cake wanted to have it back. I said no, in spite of the disgusting reality. It was horrible but I had to be firm."

"What do you mean?"

"Our people are like a submerged boulder. It cannot distinguish between rain and sunshine. Some years back, I was the opposition candidate for the last legislative elections in this area. My campaign teams went to all the nooks and crannies to tell our people that the party in power was a failure and was in no position to develop the country. We told them that for the 24 years the party has ruled the country, it has plunged it into serious and ruinous debts and economic crisis. We pointed out that all that the former regime left for posterity had either been embezzled or left to decay. We told them that their lives had been shortened by 24 years because the party in power has not provided them with the means of going to hospital if they fell sick. We emphasized that the only hope for the country was for the electorates to vote for the opposition. The people acclaimed. But a few days before the elections, the Minister of Junglety brought Pajeros and money and bought their consciences. He deceived them to vote for the party in power and so enable him maintain his position. They did. He maintains his position but all the promises he made ended with the elections. He promised them good all season roads. Where are they? Has he been here ever since?"

One day, I went to my farm at Nidong with my re-enforced pickup, the only vehicle that could ply that road. On my way back, I met a very pitiful situation at Nekom village. A boy had fallen from a palm tree and was dying. The natives pleaded that I carry the boy to hospital. I refused. When I got to another village, I met another calamity. A woman in difficult labour needed to be carried to hospital. I refused doing so. In both cases, when the natives heard the revving of my vehicle they thought God had sent them a Good Samaritan. But because I refused to play the role of that pretentious, pugnacious useless good-name-seeker, a fellow who didn't mind his business, I told them I was 'A Bad Samaritan'. That's where the name came from."

"Isn't that ridiculous and sickening? Why do you call the Good Samaritan a pretentious, pugnacious, useless good-name-seeker? Do you think he exhibited his kindness because he was looking for a good name? Furthermore, how could you have been so adamant in the face of what you saw? I mean, I am scandalized. It's unbelievable. A whole professor!"

"That is being emotional. What is at stake does not call for emotions. The difference between The Good Samaritan and The Bad Samaritan is that, The Good Samaritan acted on impulse – showing the false face of kindness. He was emotional. His patient might have been an intransigent, careless-risk-taking fellow. But because he (The Good Samaritan) did not have time to find out about his past, he went straight into helping him thereby interfering with God's purpose. But my case is different. I have a series of pictures a cameraman who accompanied my campaign team to West Bassiland took during and after the last elections. I'll like you to look at them keenly. People should learn not to eat their vomit. Look at this picture. It is the picture of the father of the boy who fell from the palm tree. See what he is holding. It is the pot of oaths. He was administering the

oath of allegiance to the ruling party to the population. He asked each villager to dip their fingers into the pot and swear that they would vote only the party in power. When the people complained about the Minister's previous unfulfilled promises of a good road, he said good road or no good road, all his people should vote the candidate of the party in power. He emphasized that on his dead body would his people vote for the opposition. Look at this second picture. You see people chasing out a team. It is people of Kole village chasing out my campaign team. They are preventing them from holding a rally. Look at this 3rd picture, you see the SDO assisting in rigging the elections. Look at this 4th picture. It is the picture of the Supreme Court judge declaring contested elections in favour of the ruling party.

Now look, ever since the ruling party won the elections they have not honoured a single pledge. Not one of them has visited West Bassiland. I lost more than sixteen million francs in the elections. Which Samaritan would be carrying to hospitals the patients of those who made him lose so much money in elections while those they voted for enjoy the booty of the rigged elections? What is the opposite of, 'One good turn deserves another'? Isn't it of course, 'One bad turn deserves another?' I know it is difficult to appreciate my reaction to those two patients. Some people, if not most, think I am downright inhuman. Am I inhuman for carrying out the sentence the patients had passed on themselves directly or indirectly? Didn't the people through their chief pass a death sentence on themselves by voting for the party in power?"

"E eh, eh, eh, I believe there is something seriously wrong somewhere. You call yourself, The Bad Samaritan – the opposite of The Good Samaritan. That will displease all Christendom. The Bad Samaritan is derogatory. It makes people think you are heartless and non-philanthropic. The stories behind the name affirm it. Don't you think you should make public your stand?"

“That is exactly what I am doing. It is up to you to make the world know the truth about my name. I have been messed up by our press but I don’t care because I believe the truth shall out one day. Our press is daft. They don’t investigate anything. They just write what they think will help them sell, or what a person who corrupts them wants. Can you imagine what they say about me? None of them has taken the pains to come and interview me. You come from afar. You have heard all bad things about me. You have taken the pains to come and interview me and get first hand information. Our papers rely on told stories. When the natives say I am mad, our papers say I am mad. When I call myself *The Bad Samaritan*, our papers call me *The Bad Samaritan*. And of course, this leaves the curious Ewawan as ignorant as he was yesterday. Yes, I am mad because I am reacting against the condoning of crime by a Criminal Court of Justice where party politics supersedes justice. They call me mad because they failed to find out the meaning behind my action.”

“As I have said, any person who hears the stories, your abandoning desperate patients to death, can only say you are callous. It hurts to think that a human being, a retired professor, a renowned citizen who sought the votes of his people to be their representative in Parliament would lean on lame excuse to abandon a woman in difficult labour to her fate. Suppose you had won the elections, would you have behaved the same?”

“You see again, your questions have the tint of emotions. Look at it this way, the patients died shortly after I had left. That shows that even if I had carried them, they would not have arrived at Tonye. They would have died on the way and I would have been forced to take them back. It was not my refusal to carry them that killed them. It was the state of the road. It was the state of the economy of this country. It was the state of negligence, the state of nonchalance of

the government about the suffering of the masses. If the party in power had honoured its numerous pledges to build good roads, the people would not have been waiting for days to have a vehicle carry their patients to hospital. If I had won the elections, I would have had a bulldozer on that road at once and the people would not have been as isolated as they are now. They chose to be isolated, to be cut off from the rest of the country and they must bear the consequences.”

“I believe this situation is going to hurt your political ambitions.”

“It is not the situation. It is the nonchalance of the set up – the numbskull of our people. Our magistrates are self-deluding and emotional. A magistrate tries a case but passes judgment on the spur of the emotional overtone of an implied case. If refusal to help carry patients to hospital was a criminal offence the aggrieved would have sued me. A man swears ‘on my dead body shall my subjects vote for the opposition’. The next day he eats his vomit when he wants help from the opposition – when he sees the dead body of his lone son. Is that correct? Didn’t he know that he was taking oath for posterity? Didn’t the Jews say the blood of Jesus should be on them and their children? What is the difference between the oath-taking chief of West Bassiland and the Jews? Who am I to change the consequences of that self inflicted curse? Or did he think it was only he himself to die? No, it wasn’t. For sure, the curse was all enlacing. To strike him hard, really hard, the God they take for granted in oath-taking struck his son, his lone son and made him pay the price. It was posterity that the chief put at stake not the sterile old folk. And here again, it was not only the chief to blame. Our papers played a major role in having things as they are now. Can you imagine that papers that sound antigovernment when elections are far, automatically become pro-government at

the fall of elections? Why that sudden change? It is for them to get into the mainstream of enjoying the loot of rigged elections. In this country papers and people work alike because the party in power corrupts and coaxes them to tell lies. In your country papers enlighten the electorates. In this country papers condone election malpractices. Chiefs vote for their subjects or force them to vote en masse for better or for worse. And when they harvest 'for worse' the wrath of God, they blame the instrument of punishment. They eat their vomit."

"You say the elections were rigged. That could not have been done by the natives. They don't count the votes. Why should they be victimized at both ends?"

"It is because they allow themselves to be used as instruments of fraud. Can you imagine that it was jobless graduates that the ruling party bribed with a few francs to stuff ballot boxes with ballot papers at the detriment of their future? Chiefs were bribed with a few thousand francs and merry-good-times at hotels to make their subjects swear by the gods to vote for the party in power at the detriment of their children's future, the detriment of their enclave and so no and so forth. Why does this happen? It is because the government uses poverty as an instrument of politics. If one takes his time and tells the natives the truth, they pout."

"I heard your vehicle was burnt. How will you have the culprits punished?"

"I can only do that if I jump ship – if I switch parties. If I declare now that I have crossed carpet, or if the opposition wins the next elections, then can I hope to see the culprits punished. But can it win? It cannot. And I can go hang if that does not please me. Am I not lucky to be alive? Suppose the natives had roasted me, would the Magistrate have reacted differently? Only the supporters of the ruling party are protected in this country."

“Won’t it then be better for you to switch parties so as to have justice? I mean, you can’t lose your vehicle like that. You need justice.”

“I don’t think it would be prudent for me to waddle in the same puddle with the monsters of the ruling party. I call them monsters because of the in-fighting, the greed, the savagery. Once they see a new face among their ranks they start thinking he has come to deprive them of their posts. They then start a war of slander and backstabbing until the intruder succumbs and pulls out or is killed.”

“That’s OK. It was a pleasure talking to you, Mr. Esole. Thank you very much.”

“You are welcome.”

Chapter Twenty Four

The fact that the CNN placed Esole's interview side by side with that of Mandela and cast the interviews for several weeks, made Esole the talk of the day. Many international papers sought to interview him. There was much debate about him. He followed up the arguments keenly, evaluating every negative comment the papers made against his action. He granted an interview with 'The Times of London'.

"Mr. Esole, your name 'The Bad Samaritan', has become a household name. If you have been following up radio and television programmes, if you have been reading local and international papers, you would have by now realized that it was imperative for you to clear your name. Can you tell us what made you react the way you did? Were you conscious of the consequences of your action?"

"I have followed up and I am scrupulously following up the media coverage of my reaction to the patients at West Bassiland. It is unfortunate that the emotional overtone of the incidents has overshadowed the mainstream issue. The mainstream issue is the enclavement of the people of West Bassiland by a nonchalant government they are made to vote for massively after every five years, and I hear it would be seven years from now, because one person wants to be in power for eternity. My reaction to the two patients has unearthed the truth about not only West Bassiland but all peoples of this country who are geographically enclaved. I did not kill the two patients. Roads abandoned by government killed them. And that is the fact. I got to the

two villages when the situation of the patients had gone beyond the competence of first aid. They both died shortly after I had left. That shows that even if I had carried them, they would have died in my vehicle before I got to Tonye. Can you imagine the bashing, the rocking and all-what-not-shocks they would have been subjected to in a vehicle with chained tyres and reinforced shock absorbers? Do you know what it means to transport a patient to hospital in a bulldozer?"

"You are right. But the fact is you were faced with a situation of life and death, and most unfortunately, death in childbirth. Death threat in childbirth is a very sensitive issue to all humanity. And the world over, women are reacting negatively to your reaction. I believe you would have saved your face by risking taking the patients to the hospital. Suppose that situation were to happen today wouldn't you react otherwise? Don't you regret your reaction?"

"I don't think regretting my reaction is the question. My reaction is more of a practical lesson than an issue of debate. In that situation only two died. Can you imagine how many die every year without notice in villages more hinterland than Nekom and Kole? I think fate brought this matter to the limelight because if the natives had not burnt my vehicle nobody would have known about the patients."

"So, you still believe you acted well?"

"I have no regrets. I say so not because I am insensitive to the situation. I am very conscious of every fact about it. But I don't regret. I shall only regret if the message does not sink into the skulls of the concerned. And I believe it may not sink because the emotional overtones are overriding the main issue."

"I believe your political ambitions have been greatly compromised by those incidents."

“You may be right because of the numbed skulls of our people. They cannot draw inferences from situations. They subject themselves to exploitation and when they have the opportunity to fight back, they remain uncommitted. Look, a people’s bank (POSB) runs bankrupt. The Minister and the Director General are considered main suspects. A Presidential degree sacks them from their offices and everybody expects imprisonment for the two. Nothing happens. The population sits quiet licking their wounds. If it were in other countries there would have been riots. But in this country, people instead hailed the President for sacking the Minister and the Director General as if that would bring back their money. Suppose the President had used the two as scapegoats? And I suspect that is what happened. Just tell me, isn’t something seriously wrong somewhere? What complacency!”

“You sound as if you would welcome a coup d’état in this country. Am I right?”

“A coup d’état is the sad alternative of a failed democracy. Any sensible politician won’t go in for it because of the unpredictable consequences. But eh, e, e...”

“Are you ready to contest the next elections in spite of the damage your reaction to the patients might have caused you?”

“I don’t think any damage has been done to me. I believe what is necessary is explaining to the people the issues at stake. I have got feedbacks from some villagers who burnt my vehicle. Some of them now understand why I did not carry their patients to hospital. The majority has to be talked to. With time, most will understand that the problem is with the government and not with me.”

“OK, thank you very much. Good luck.”

“You’re welcome.”

Chapter Twenty Five

Esole developed slight headache after the interview. He compared the two interviews and found out that they dwelt on the same thing. He yawned, stretched himself and wondered why even the international media could not blame the deaths of the two patients on the state of the roads rather than on his refusal to carry the patients to hospital. Elections were fourteen months away. If they were held at that moment, the ruling party would capitalize on the emotional overtone of his attitude toward the patients and win decisively. So, it was imperative for him to bail himself out of it by starting to campaign well ahead of the ruling party. He had to prove to the people that his action was not because he was heartless but because he wanted to teach them through hard facts the need to reconsider their stand vis-a-vis the ruling party.

Two weeks after the interview, he left for Tuala and bought two second-hand pickups. He took them to Beri's brother's garage where the first pickup had been reinforced. He introduced himself to Beri's brother and described the reinforcement he needed. Lanso, Beri's brother worked on the vehicles for two weeks. When Esole returned to collect them, he was full of praises for a job well done. He did not take the vehicles straight to Tonye. To boost the morale of the militants of his party at Lebmot he made a dash there, summoned a meeting of the party and showed the militants the new acquisitions. He asked the militants to make strategies based on the new realities of the party – his financial muscles and the improved logistics for the

forthcoming elections. He said the reason why they lost the previous election was that, they were badly handicapped in logistics and cash. But with two all seasons and all roads vehicles at their disposal, they were better equipped to challenge the fleet of vehicles the Minister of Jungletyry would put forth.

In receiving the two vehicles two elated stall warts of the party, Pa Joe Ndanga, a retired police sergeant, and Mr. Nzingaah a prominent farmer, donated a Land Rover and a pickup respectively. They asked Esole to repair them for party use. He thanked the two patriots and immediately set mechanics working on the two vehicles. The two would be used in lower, central and northern reaches of Lebmot Sub-Division. The reinforced pickups from Tuala would be used in West Bassiland where Esole would concentrate his activities. After those arrangements, he left for Tonye.

He arrived at Tonye late on Friday evening. To his surprise, he found the premises of Eso & Sons Enterprises teaming with people from West Bassiland. They had come to spend the night rather than trek to and from Tonye on Saturday. All the rest rooms were booked. Esole was so delighted that he reduced the cost per room by half and offered to transport the people back home the next day. With that generosity, the people had extra money to drink and make merry the whole night. Thus, though Esole lost in terms of board, he gained from bar sales. Furthermore, his approach to an apparent reconciliation with the people who had virtually boycotted his business premises after his refusal to carry their patients to hospital, was a commendable strategy toward laying the foundation for future exploits in the area.

After the market on Saturday, he instructed Ngwa and Mukete to carry the people to their respective villages. As the people entered the vehicles, they hailed him and promised coming to spend the night next Saturday. The drive

from Tonye to the border between Tonye Sub-Division and Lebmot Sub-Division 4 km. away was smooth. But once the people got to their side of the border, they saw the difference between them and the people who lived on the Tonye side of the border.

The two vehicles revved virtually on the same spot as they lumbered from pothole to pothole roaring and skipping out with much force, smashing and bashing the passengers and loads from side to side, and forward and backward. The women screamed and yelled and cried with every violent jerk. Before long, because of friction caused by holding firmly onto bars some of them developed blisters in their palms and could hold on no more. They asked the drivers to stop and they climbed down, preferring to continue the rest of the journey on foot. While the women and some men trekked, some young men braved the bashing. By the time they got to Kole village, their palms were badly sore and they swore never to continue with the vehicles to Nidong. At Kole, they waited for the people they had left behind. There wasn't much difference in time taken. The people arrived a few minutes later and after each person had taken their loads, they asked the two drivers to return to Tonye.

Esole was surprise to see his drivers return that early.

"What happened? You drove so fast?" he asked.

"The people especially the women could not withstand the bashing, jerking and shocks. So, when we got to Kole village they said they preferred continuing the rest of the journey on foot. They thanked you for your kindness," Ngwa explained.

"Thank you, you have made a point," Esole said with delight.

Chapter Twenty Six

Esole thought he had to make good use of a golden opportunity. There was no time to waste. Time should not blur the hard facts. He had to strike the iron while it was hot. So, on Sunday afternoon, he set off for Kole village. He knew he would meet the people in their famous El Dora do bar. In going, he took along some good cash to entertain the people. He got to Kole village at 4.15 p.m. and as expected met the bar full. The people recognized the vehicle and rushed to welcome the driver. To their surprise, they saw Esole himself. They welcomed him heartily and invited him to sit down. One man offered him a beer. Esole sat down to drink it.

“I shall not be drinking while you watch. Barman, give everybody here a beer,” Esole demanded.

The atmosphere in the bar changed immediately. The people sprinted forward each trying to get a bottle of beer before the barman ran out of stock. Those who got beer did not wait for an opener. They wrenched open the bottles with their teeth and raised them to cheer up although the others still struggled to get theirs. In that cacophony, some people sent for their wives and other relatives they had left at home. The people came in stealthily. That was not necessary. Esole wanted the whole village to come if that were possible. By the time the last person got his bottle, some had drunk theirs by half. Esole raised his bottle and the bar roared “cheers!” followed by a long drawn silence, and then long drawn belches. The people who came later were also served. Esole peeped into the store and found that the barman had a good stock.

“Barman, take note, when people finish the first round give them a second round. Each person should have two, two only. If you give more you will pay for it yourself,” Esole instructed.

As the people drank, two middle aged women came in with walking sticks groaning. They greeted Esole and sat close to him. One of them looked up to him with a rather dismal note.

“Madam, what is wrong? You are not well?” Esole asked.

“Master, your generosity has killed me. The vehicle you gave us yesterday to bring us back home has shattered my backbone. I have never had such rough ride before,” the woman said.

“Sorry madam. I thought I was helping you but it has turned out to be a bad thing I did. What really happened?”

“Master, I don’t know what to blame – the vehicle or the bad road. It should be the bad road. Because of the bad road, the vehicle rocked, banged and bashed us from side to side, from front to back and from back to front. Before long, most people developed sore palms from holding firmly to bars. Although I sat on a bag of rice and held firmly onto a bar. I wasn’t long in that delusion of safety when I was jolted out of my position and slammed back with a devastating bang. The vehicle had suddenly taken a nosedived into a pothole and roared out with unbelievable force. My backbone snapped, stars raced in my eyes and I felt excruciating pains slash through my back. It was a horrible experience. In spite of the pain, I preferred to do the rest of the journey on foot. I thought I was alone in that situation. But when I asked the driver to stop, I was surprised at the number of people who went down the vehicle and took to trekking.”

“*A nyango* weren’t you lucky! You landed on a bag of rice. That was as soft as a bag of cotton. But can you imagine my fate? I was ripped from the iron bar on which I

sat, then slammed back with unimaginable force. My backbone cracked *kuag*. And that was it. That was it of my backbone, not only my backbone but also my buttocks. My buttocks are still having painful spasms,” the other woman said.

“That is pitiful Madam. Instead of the vehicle relieving you it hurt you. That means at both ends you were exposed to death. And I believe, not because of the vehicle but because of the bad road,” Esole remarked.

“You are right,” some young men responded in unison.

“Thank you gentlemen. But should this remain for eternity? See, West Bassiland is an enclave. This thick mountainous forest cuts it off from its Sub-Divisional Head Quarters Lebmot. If you cut across through here, straight here, you will do only 18kms to Lebmot. The road was surveyed long ago. But to get to Lebmot now, you have to go round and round through Tonye to Tumba then to Lebmot. You cover more than 132kms. Can you imagine that! Unless the Mayor of Lebmot sees a person from here or he is reminded of this area, he does not remember that there are people here. Can such a person think of developing this area? Unless elections remind the Minister and the Parliamentarian that there are people here they never think of you people. This area is only accessible through Tonye. This Nidong/Tonye road is the handiwork of your fore-parents. They dug it with hoes. Nothing has been added to it ever since. The government for which you vote massively every five years cleans it only once in five years, a day or two before elections. Unlike your fore-parents, you have lost the spirit of community work. Your fore-parents used to clear the road and fill the potholes themselves. But ever since the government introduced bulldozers in clearing the road and used that as an effective propaganda tool, you have become complacent. But let me tell you, the fate of this area is in your hands. Every year the government

promises to bulldoze a road from here to Ntusi and thus link up with Lebmot. Has that been done? A few days to elections they will come again and tell you lies. Last year there was a rumour that a contract was signed with Kunze'mmuad. She was to bulldoze the road and link this area with Ntusi and consequently Lebmot. She even brought caterpillars here but where is the road today? By depriving you of a good road the government has auctioned you to death. When you fall sick or there is an emergency situation, you can't be transported to Tonye, your only gateway to the outside world. And even if you get the luck of having a vehicle, actual transportation becomes impracticable. If you heard and understood what these women said, and you deem it true then what do you expect? If able bodied people cannot withstand transportation by vehicle, can sick people do so? Who is to blame in this situation – the owner of the vehicle or the government that is supposed to build the road?"

Esole's question clicked opened the minds of the people and they remembered the incidents of his refusal to carry their patients to hospital. Guilt slashed through the spine of those who took part in burning his first vehicle. They swallowed hard spittle. Their beer tasted funny for a while.

"Yes, nobody blows the wet-wood fire of another person. By this I mean, nobody can solve your problems for you. You must assert yourselves. You must make yourselves known. Don't be deceived by the Minister's empty promises of a brighter future for you. Life is now not tomorrow. A ruler who cannot provide you with the basic tools of survival now should not promise you a brighter tomorrow. Your graduate children are roaming the streets without jobs. You are here an exclave. Make yourselves known by rebelling against the government. Don't vote for the party in power and you will see. You will see that the government will turn its attention onto you after the elections. Yes see, wherever

there is strong opposition that is where the government turns its attention. Go round this country and discover the truth of what I am saying. Go to Menda, strong opposition bastion, all roads are tarred. Go to Bassam, all roads are tarred. But come here, the base of the claque of government, there are no roads, all because you have made yourselves a given to government. And so, they take you for an easy ride. You have the right to good roads even if they are earth roads.” Esole lectured.

“I have told my people that long ago. I have told them that it wasn’t wise for all of us to belong to the same political party. In their response they say, in a situation in which there is a contest for a sword, he who grasps it by the handle wins he who grasps it by the blade. They say it is better to deal with the devil one knows than with the angel one doesn’t know,” a young man said.

“That is the vile, the intoxicating and vain talk of those who lick the boots of the Minister, those who think of themselves first. But let me tell you, this country cannot change unless we all say enough is enough. For how long have those who grasped the sword by the handle been grasping? In other words, for how long have you been dealing with the devil you know? Isn’t the word ‘devil’ itself scary? I tell you, you will remain an enclave unless you discard the idea of somebody being up there for your interest.”

“Then what is the purpose of your talking to us? You are talking to us because you want to be up there for our interest. When we elect you, will you be up there or down here? How sure are you that we shall be better off when you climb? Isn’t it better to deal with politicians whose personal coffers are full than those whose coffers are empty?” the headmaster of the village school asked.

There was a rustle as the people readjusted themselves on their seats in an attempt to reason things out in line with the H/M. His question was pertinent, challenging and tended

to water down everything The BS had said. For sure politics was for self interest. If it wasn't, they expected The BS to respond. He stood silent for a long minute, completely lost in thought. At last, as if he was recovering from a trance, he tried to excuse himself.

“My friend, it is getting late and I must return. But I shall make time to come here and talk to you. In spite of that, I should say that the flying wheel of democracy is free and fair elections. There is beauty in change. If you elect me and I perform contrary to expectation, you elect somebody else in the next election. And that is it. When the common man can effect change in the people who represent them in all political posts including the Presidency, they can be rest assured that their interests would be taken care of. As I say, it is late for me to enlighten you on the realities of politics. Good bye.”

Chapter Twenty Seven

The BS's interaction with the people yielded good fruits. The village split into two factions – those that backed him and those that stood against him. Those who backed him argued that the state of the road was to blame for the death of the two patients and not The BS's refusal to carry them to hospital. Those who opposed him argued that he was heartless and would be worse as a representative of the people. Two weeks after the encounter, the chief of Kole village sent an envoy to see The BS at Tonye.

“Please Sir, my chief has sent me to tell you that you should come and launch your party in Kole. He says everybody apart from the headmaster and a few diehard supporters of the ruling party wants to jump party. He says in coming, you should bring the Press for maximum coverage.”

The BS vibrated with joy. He could not believe his ears. He had expected positive reaction from his interaction with the people but not of the magnitude the envoy was implying.

“Tell the chief I am extremely grateful but I can't make time now because I am leaving for Lebmot tomorrow. I have to reorganize the SPDP organs in northern, southern and eastern Bassiland for the oncoming elections. I think our best bet for your village is three weeks from now, that is, Sunday May 20th. Tell him we have to make it a grand occasion. So, he must rally his people to build sheds, look for palm wine, local foodstuffs, and whatever will embellish the occasion. I shall send a cow and bring along imported

drinks and foods. He should also invite people from neighbouring villages. Three weeks is ample time to prepare.”

The envoy returned and delivered the message. The chief set to work immediately and in three weeks all was set. News had spread everywhere of the launching of the Serious People's Deliverance Party (SPDP) in Kole village. The cow The BS had sent had been tethered at the road junction for several days and rumour had it that he was bringing lorry loads of beers and assorted imported drinks. On Sunday 20th, the clergy were advised to conduct their sermons early and make them as short as possible. By midday, Kole village was swarming with people from all villages in West Bassiland.

The launching started shortly after the MC introduced the occasion and the dignitaries of the village. The chief made a brief welcome speech in which he admonished the ruling party. He pointed out how for decades the people of West Bassiland have supported the party in power, the empty promises leaders of the party had made and why it was necessary for the people to jump ship. After the speech even some diehard loyalists of the ruling party thought it was imperative for them to move party. Kole village was divided into four electoral districts and twelve cells. The officers were elected and installed after free, transparent and fair elections. For once the people enjoyed electing the people they wanted to lead them. As the event was about to move into what is popularly known as item eleven (entertainment), the chiefs of other villages, led by the chief of Nidong announced their intent to decamp also. They asked The BS to make a programme for the launching of the SPDP in their respective villages.

The BS did not waste time. He quickly made a programme starting with Nidong then Nekom, Mengueh, Ebore, Nyale and so on. He praised the chiefs and people

of West Bassiland for getting out of deep slumber to challenge the status quo. He said he had had the same success in Lebmot north, east and south three weeks earlier. He said at last, the people of Pekuguba Division were realizing that their fate was in their hands. He advised them not to relent their efforts in consolidating their resolve to fight against the lies the ruling party has been telling them. He warned them against distracters who would try to derail their resolve to follow the right course. Then he alluded to the H/M's question.

“Before we go onto item eleven (entertainment),” he said, “I would like to comment on what the headmaster said last time I was here. He echoed the expression that, “It is better to deal with the devil you know than with the angel you don't know.” The mere mention of ‘devil’ and ‘angel’ is telling. Even a baby knows that devil is bad and angel is good. There is no twist in this – devil is bad and angel is good. But see the bile in politicians. They try to distort even the meanings of straightforward words in order to mask themselves with the panel beaten meaning. They give the expression a twist that sounds logical to the common folk. They (the party in power) are the devils that you know, trustworthy devils! And we (the opposition) are the angels you don't know, untrustworthy angels! Can you imagine what it takes a dog-licked-faced politician, a shameless fellow to put forth such lame logic!

For the H/M of a village school to echo that expression is tantamount to his having been brainwashed or his being ignorant of basic realities – cause and effect. The value of a country is judged by the quality of its teachers, knowledgeable teachers and not teachers who echo limping expressions by non-consequential politicians. Non-consequential politicians are politicians who bring no development to their constituencies. They are those who have nothing to offer in Parliamentary debates. When real

parliamentarians discuss and share development projects among themselves, the also-went-to- Parliament, the mute salary and allowance mongers clap hands and return to their constituencies to make reported speeches to their people. They return empty handed. What development have the devils-you-know brought to this locality ever since you knew them? How have they affected the lives of teachers? Teachers have no other way of making money. So, their salaries should be sufficiently handsome in order not to lead them into the temptation of part-time teaching in other institutions or make them cultivate cash crops, and vegetable gardens behind their houses. Any of those distractions impairs the learning/teaching process. Our headmaster's remarks were not only surprising but self defeating. They show that he is not current with basic issues or like the dirty politician, he is a lamp lit and put under a table.

I can't mince words on this. I believe the headmaster has outlived his usefulness in this place and he is rusting. He must go out and meet the challenges of hard times this regime has meted on the civil servant. Perhaps that would expose him to reading newspapers and thus improve on his knowledge. I recommend that he be transferred to a township to face the realities of our country. In this rural area, I know he has a cocoa farm and a subsistence food-crop farm. That is why he does not feel the pinch of the economic crisis. This is the twentieth year since salaries were cut in this country. Before then, headmasters earned FCFA 250,000 a month. Prices were low. A bottle of gaz cost FCFA 1,500 When salaries were cut, they earned FCFA 1,200,000 a month. Prices rose, a bottle of gaz costs FCFA 6,000. In other words each of them is deprived of FCFA 130,000 monthly. Multiply that by 12 months then 20 years. Add that to the money they lose to a bank called Credit Foncier, and ERTV. That is what each pumps into

the national economy for the people of the ruling clans to embezzle. And when the dare-the-devil risk-takers question the status quo, headmasters talk of the devil you know. Do you know what that means? In spite of what they lose per month, teachers can't even teach in ideal environments. Look at what government calls schools! Fowls in a good poultry are better housed. Can any right thinking person working under these conditions advocate to deal with the devil they know?

My dear village people, look at the prices of your farm products. What has happened to them? Can the government tell you that the white man who bought your coffee, tea, cocoa, timber, rubber and so on, died two years after Saul Kilcam took over power? And when a headmaster tells you to deal with the devil you know than with the angel you don't know, will you take him seriously?

Today is a new dawn. West Bassiland has shed its old skin. The future of this country is in your hands. Be steadfast, be determined, be courageous. Nothing good comes easily. You will have temptations. But your resolve to survive, your determination to jump ship should propel you forward. Go on, courageous people of West Bassiland. Salvage this country from the calamities that this administration has heaved on it.

Long live the people of West Bassiland, long live the SPDP, long live the Republic of Ewawa."

"Oh *A mue!*" an elated old man drew the attention of his friend. "It is marvellous to be educated. Hear the meaning of the expression politicians have been using here to deceive us! A knowledgeable man has today unfolded the true meaning of it."

"*A Sango,*" his friend responded. "A village without learned people is cast in permanent darkness. A village where teachers become farmers can count itself out of the limelight. This H/M is overdue in this village."

“Isn’t that what I said when he was caught with Nnoko’s wife? Didn’t I say we should seek for his transfer? You all said he was doing a good job because his school scored 100% in the FSLC examination. Now see the type of ignorance he exhibits! Can he open his mouth?” a young man taunted.

“*A mme*, his wife is listening,” somebody remarked.

“Do you think we are gossiping? We want to tell him in his face that he provoked The BS.”

Chapter Twenty Eight

The H/M was completely devastated. He had all along thought of himself as a celebrity in the area. In fact most people thought of him as the icon of knowledge in the area. Now, in the presence of men, women and children he was defrocked. All over the place, the natives gossiped saying a big teacher has wrenched a small teacher.

“If it is dog chop dog, I shall see how a retired professor will swallow me in a village that means more to me than my village of birth. I have my farms here. I am here not because of teaching but because of my farms. What do I get from the teaching field! My main stay here is cocoa farming. And a stranger wants me transferred. I shall not go on transfer alone. We shall go together.”

“What can the yells of a fowl do to the sky-bound kite?” his wife asked helplessly.

“Look, I promise that The BS will pay dearly for his portentousness”.

“I shall live to see you disgrace him as he has disgraced you. All West Bassiland is here. Everybody has heard what he has done to you.”

“I shall show him that it is not all toads that snakes swallow. I am not mincing words. I shall make him piss in-between his legs like a woman. You will see.”

“That is the mane of a he-goat.”

“Wait and see.”

Three weeks later, the H/M left stealthily for Dande to see the Minister of Junglety and the incumbent parliamentarian. He told them of the political inroads The

BS was making in Bassiland and urged them to take prompt action to stop him. "I offer my services. I promise you, I'll undo him if you can assist me."

"Elections are one year away from now. He has started too early. Allow him wear himself out. We shall start three months to the elections. A concentrated onslaught when he might have run out of steam will blow him off – he and his henchmen as the wind blows husk. Just take note of all those who collaborate with him. They will be punished," the Minister said.

"*Monsieur le Ministre*, you may be right. But look at it this way. I am afraid to say it, but I must be frank. Our MP is not popular with the people at all and he knows that himself. In the same vein, our government is a lame dog. It has a lot of loopholes. And its critics always sound credible. Sometimes I feel ashamed when every word a critic utters against either the MP or the government cannot be proven false. Many people listen to the opposition because they give hard facts on the weaknesses of the MP and the government. If The BS is given a longer time to pollute the area, he would end up making indelible marks. I am afraid he may establish a diehard corps."

"What then is your strategy?" the incumbent MP asked.

"I suggest that you give me the means to challenge him. I shall surely report to you what I have done to neutralize him. I live in West Bassiland and I know what I'll use to neutralize him. I'll get him by the flanks."

"I think your best bet is to attack his main stay – his business. Let's destroy his business. I hear he has more money now than he had during the last election. That can be very dangerous. If he could be such a formidable candidate in the last election when he was poor, he would be unstoppable this time," the Minister remarked.

"*Monsieur le Ministre*, I think we better see the Secretary General of our party for help. He has funds for situations like these. Several companies have been asked to donate

toward the election effort. I hear Ewawa Oil Company donated FCFA 350,000,000 the other day. Ewawa Banana Company donated FCFA 150,000,000 last Friday and one of the Timber Companies donated FCFA 300,000,000. Other companies will follow suit. He will surely help and if we can chip in something to boost our friend, he will return well armed to tackle the problem,” the incumbent suggested.

“I see with you. We should aim at giving The BS a crushing defeat this time. Foreign observers may be more sympathetic with the opposition this time because of what they heard about the last elections. Let’s crush him and put an end to his political ambitions. We should use the instruments of power in place and crush him,” the Minister said.

The next day, the incumbent, the Minister and the H/M saw the SG and he assisted them with FCFA 15,000,000. The Minister augmented the amount with FCFA 4,000,000 and the incumbent with FCFA 5,000,000. They promised more help before the elections. The H/M returned to Kole as stealthily as he had gone to Dande. Upon his return, he told his wife little about his trip. Three weeks later he bought a building plot opposite the famous bar. A week later, the village was surprised with the quality and quantity of building material he deposited at the plot. Within four days, seasoned carpenters from Tonye, came to build the house. It was divided into three sections – a big open hall, two outdoor rooms and an indoor one.

“Where has the H/M taken money to build this structure? Although it is a plank building, it is the most imposing building in all of West Bassiland,” one man remarked.

“Is he not a man? A man is a man. He might have enrolled in a club. He might have borrowed. He might have done several things,” his friend responded.

“My wife asked his wife but it seems as if even his wife doesn’t know the source of the sudden wealth.”

"You see, I suspect he has entered a sect. You will soon hear that his family members have begun dying. That is how *Sango* Etame lost most of his family members. He went to Tonye and was initiated into a sect. Very soon he became suddenly rich. Then his family started dying like chicken. For sure, the H/M has soiled his hands."

The H/M's sudden wealth became the talk of the day. Most People said bad things about his sudden wealth until one school teacher postulated that he might have gone to Dande to take his arrears. His arrears had been accumulating there for years. Unlike other teachers who had had and squandered theirs, he got his and was investing it.

That dispelled the fears the earlier rumours had implanted in the population. The people who had been avoiding him for fear of being initiated into the sect started getting close.

When the building was completed, the H/M asked his wife what business she thought would be ideal.

"On-licensed bar with music reminiscent of 'Eso & Sons Enterprises' Tonye."

"This is Kole not Tonye."

"That is the more reason why we should bring the ambiance in Tonye here."

"To challenge the invincible idol of the SPDP?"

"I am not talking politics. I am talking of something that would interest the people and bring pleasure to this area."

So, in the pretext of respecting his wife's wishes, the H/M opened a bar and a provision store.

"What shall we name the business?"

"Ngalamo's Golden Gate Enterprises."

"You are being confrontational. Why add Enterprises in the name? Furthermore, I don't like that personalization. I want something more en-globing."

"OK, let's call it 'West Bassiland Bar'."

"That sounds good. But suppose we called it 'Western End Bar?'"

“That’s lovely.”

Two weeks later, the H/M invited all the villages of West Bassiland and dignitaries from Tonye, notably the Police Commissioner and the SDO for the inauguration of the bar. The news that he had received his arrears and had made good use of it earned him great admiration. Although his investment did not match that of The BS in Tonye, the whole of West Bassiland was proud that they had an entertainment centre within reach. They could converge at Kole on Sundays and have the fun that was previously the preserve of Tonye. Men, women and children attended the inauguration. The chief of Kole in pouring libation said the whole of West Bassiland was proud of the H/M and wished him both ancestral and God’s blessings. The dignitaries from Tonye also expressed their appreciation and promised to help him succeed.

While people lavished praises on him, the H/M remained cool, humble and very welcoming. Everybody was surprised that a man so rich could be so self-effacing. He spoke in simple terms, thanked the people for honouring his invitation and promised his business would be more philanthropic than commercial. He said his aim was not to make money, but to elevate the standard of living of the people of West Bassiland, especially in the raining season when the area is cut off from the rest of the world. He then unveiled the name of the business, giving credit to his wife for the choice of name. The population gave him a standing ovation. They were proud of the name because it portrayed common interest. It was ‘Western End Bar’ and not the H/M’s.

“What selflessness! What humility!” Sone exclaimed.

“That is the man to lead people. A man who teaches by example,” Nkalle intercepted.

“We should simply call it, ‘The Western’ so that every West Bassiland person should wholeheartedly identify themselves with it. It is our bar and nobody else’s.

With that, the people fondly called the bar, 'The Western,' and made it the centre of their attraction. Some fanatics spent most of their time in it. The H/M provided a variety of in-door games and good music.

One month after the inauguration, the rains set in, cutting off West Bassiland from the rest of the world. The Western, reduced prices of commodities by half. Beer that cost FCFA 500 in Tonye cost FCFA 250 in Kole village. The population protested, saying that the reduction in price would undermine the business and lead to its collapse. And if that happened, they would be forced to go back to the old habit of going to Tonye for entertainment. The H/M assured them that even if he gave out the beer for free he would not go bankrupt.

"Have you heard what the man-pass-man has said? If he can also buy a *passé-partous* vehicle, then we shall no more tolerate Bad Samaritans amongst us," Esemé said.

"*Massa*, you are right. Do you think he will not buy one very soon? The H/M was wise. He allowed his arrears to accumulate and when he found that he had something heavy he went for it. See how simple he is! He does not spite people like other rich people do," Nzame chipped in.

"I believe The BS will piss in his pants if he hears what the H/M whom he chastised in the presence of men, women and children has become. Those who chided the H/M then, now hang their heads in shame. Some people are too ashamed to go to his bar." Nsime rebuked.

The reduction of prices and the re-assurance that that won't hurt the business earned the H/M greater admiration and respect. He had fulfilled his promise of making his enterprises more philanthropic than commercial. And with that, the people of West Bassiland saw no need going to Tonye. Only those who were in dire need of money went to Eso & Sons Enterprises in Tonye, for advanced payments for pledged-sales of produce. Pledged-sales or promise to sell produce was a grasping system introduced by out-of-

season buyers. Farmers who found themselves in serious financial difficulties out-of-season, applied for pledged-sales advances and were made to sign documents promising to sell their produce at half the normal price on-season. When Eso & Sons Enterprises started operations, they modernized the terms to the benefit of the farmers. They gave the farmer an advanced payment for the pledged-sales and gave him the balance upon delivery of the produce.

When The Western reduced prices, the population took onto heavy drinking and praise singing. The owner of the once famous bar was particularly aggrieved. His business was undermined and he thought of folding up. But time and again, he thought that the H/M would soon run bankrupt. Unfortunately for him, as the months passed by, the H/M waxed on well. Very soon, he started giving advanced payments for cocoa and coffee pledged-sales. He modified Eso & Sons terms and gave the farmers not only the balance but also a bonus upon delivery of the produce. All West Bassiland turned to him.

Eso & Sons Enterprises found a sudden drop in their business transactions with West Bassiland. Not only did the people cease going to Tonye, they even stopped asking for pledged-sales advances. Fearing that the people might not honour the pledged-sales contracts already established, The BS decided to find out. Upon arrival at Kole village the man who had the once famous bar told him of the H/M's inroads into business.

"He got arrears, bought a plot, built that building and bought a generator and a powerful musical set. Everybody goes there. I stay for days without selling a single bottle because he does not only provide better conditions, he has also reduced prices by half."

"How can that work? How can he sustain the loss of more than half of what he should sell a beer here. Beer can't be cheaper here than Tonye. It can't. There should be

something greater than arrears. What arrears can a primary school teacher get to display such arrogance? It is a ploy beyond village understanding. It is a ploy by the ruling party. This is reminiscent to dumping – a sinister system intended to lead to habit formation. And once the natives become addicted and useless, the perpetrators will increase and even double prices in order to regain four times what they are losing now. In fact they will create a situation in which they will be in control of the psyche of the population. That is the design of the H/M of a primary school. He wants to make West Bassiland a replica of Dande. In Dande people drink and lose their faculty of reasoning. This is real nonsense. Can anyone say this government is of good intent? Isn't it worse than a dragon with seven heads? Stupid, shit.”

“They say he got FCFA 10,000,000. We believe because if Mr. Nzalle an ordinary teacher got FCFA 8,000,000 two years ago, what more of an H/M? He got big arrears. They say ever since he returned from college and was appointed H/M he had not been reclassified. So his reclassification and H/M allowance had accumulated for years, for more than fifteen years.”

“Yes, even if he got one billion, he would not be selling things at half the cost price. He pays transport to and fro to buy them in Tonye. The cost of the things plus transport will definitely make them more expensive here than in Tonye. Furthermore, how can he be involved in business now? He is not yet on retirement. So, he can't engage in business. Thirdly, he has no license for the business. I detect some sinister intent in what is going on. I thought of going to finalize campaign preparations at Lebmot. But with these new developments, I have to talk to the chiefs of West Bassiland. I have to convene a meeting next Sunday.”

“You will better move from village to village. If you convene the meeting here nobody will listen to you. Our people have become fanatical.”

Chapter Twenty Nine

The BS returned to Tonye with a very heavy heart. Two days later, he returned to West Bassiland to talk to the chiefs. He convened the first impromptu meeting with three neighbouring villages at Nidong in the chief's house.

“Chiefs, I have come to tell the population of West Bassiland that people who take pleasure in living on wind falls, destroy their ability to reason and work. They die physically, morally and psychologically. Though they may move about, they become like husks blown about by the wind. I have observed with great concern, the H/M's diabolic scheme to destroy the people of West Bassiland by providing them with free drinks. Can anybody imagine the consequences of such a scheme? Isn't it only stupid people who can say that the H/M's scheme is of good intent? Where have people ever heard that a trader sells at a loss? For sure, a company that survives on selling at a loss has immoral sponsors behind the screen. And let me tell you, our country is run on the same line as what is happening at Kole. Bloodhound sects sponsor our rulers and they anesthetize the population with drinks. Alcohol is cheaper in this country than anywhere else in the world. How did it start? It all started when French entrepreneurs incorporated our leaders in shareholding in distilling and brewing industries. Our leaders were then asked to relax the laws binding the opening of bars. With that, they declared the free opening of bars and made prices of wines and beers unimaginably low. The population went mad with joy. But they got it all wrong. Low prices led to very poor quality beers and wines – beers

and wines that are dangerous to health. The seller can never sell at a loss. Low prices aim at making the people addicts. And once they became addicts, they became the political robots of the ruling party. They became impotent in every sphere of life. Today, they can't reason. They can't question what the government does.

Addiction is stupefying. People leave here for Kole even late at night to go and drink free drinks in what they call, 'The Western'. Very soon, they will become alcoholic. And when they become alcoholic, they will become promiscuous, become carriers of venereal diseases and spreaders of AIDS, become irresponsible and finally become incapable of caring for their families. This will put the education of their children in jeopardy and lead to frequent quarrels with their wives. That is not all. Once they become alcoholic, their farms will degenerate and they will sell them in order to satisfy their addictions. Who will buy the farms? Of course, the H/M.

Wherever people take onto drinking, their youngsters turn onto crime when they are short of money. For example, in Dande, the crime rate has more than quadrupled. The government is unable to control the delinquents and is gradually handing over the population to thieves and armed robbers. That is what is going to happen here. Now, people can go anywhere at night but when addiction will turn the merry-go-round drunks into criminals, it would be impossible to travel from here to Kole even in the day. I have come that we put our heads together and stop the storm before it blows off our roofs."

"Please Sir," Mesape addressed The Bad Samaritan. "Our people are controlled by their throats. What goes down their throats controls their reasoning. That old man there, *Sango Ejome* has warned the people of this village against going to have free drinks at Kole. His argument is that whatever is free is a baited trap. The people with long throats and good appetite do not listen."

“You are worried about the wrong premise,” Ngwene retorted. “I don’t care whether people become alcoholic or not. That is their business. My worry is that, the H/M wants to deprive Nidong of its Headquarters status. He wants to make Kole the capital of West Bassiland. There is a rumour that the outside room of his bar, the one that he never opens is intended to be the office of the ruling party. I was told that he has written a banner with the caption, “West Bassiland Headquarters of EPAD”. His aim is therefore to draw as much attention to Kole village as he can. Since in this country only the ruling party wins elections, once it wins the on-coming elections, the capital status of Nidong will move to Kole.”

“You heard that and you kept it to yourself?” an angry boy interjected.

“What would I have done?”

“You should have told the chief to convene a meeting for us to take counter measures. We would have pulled down that house by now.”

“That would have been violence. I don’t want any violent reaction. If there are new findings, let’s put our heads together to see how we can destroy the H/M’s ploy without resorting to violence,” The BS advised.

“Please, I have something to say,” Ebang raised his hand and seized the floor. “I want to say that what we are saying about ‘The Western’ is false. I am not used to mincing words. I believe The BS is saying all this because ‘The Western’ has undermined his business. If it is the question of promoting alcoholism, he should be the first person to bear the blame. When people spent sleepless nights in his bar, he never complained. Now, there is a patriot who is keeping everybody happy and he is complaining. I shall go to Kole and have my fun. Those who don’t want to go should stay behind and not worry people.”

“My friend you have got it wrong. And from what you say, I can deduce that you are at the verge of being the first victim of the H/M’s ploy. I never made people spend sleepless nights in my bar. West Bassiland people go to Tonye once a week to relieve themselves of the boredom of this enclave, have recreation and buy their needs for the week. So, once a week, on Saturdays they drank or drink in my bar. Furthermore, what it takes to drink one beer there is what it takes to drink two in Kole. Mine is not habit forming. The H/M’s is.”

“We need not quarrel over that,” the chief advised. “Everybody knows that the H/M is not of good intent. We thought he was vying for a political post but he does not seem to take interest in politics. So, we must watch him closely. If what *Mue* Ngwene has said is true we shall show the H/M that he is not a West Bassiland son and as such, he cannot change the status of our villages.”

“Chief, he is definitely sponsored by either the Minister or the incumbent Parliamentarian. I know how these things work,” The BS said.

“If he is the protégé of somebody else then their ploy is aimed at the oncoming elections. So, to counter their move, we have to convene a meeting of all West Bassiland chiefs for them to reiterate their pledge to vote for the opposition. That is our best bet. You may be right that the H/M is the proxy of the incumbent. So, let’s convene a meeting of all West Bassiland chiefs.”

Chapter Thirty

All West Bassiland chiefs attended the meeting and after examining their situation vis-a-vis the ruling party, they reiterated their resolve to vote for the opposition. Chief Nkume gave a litany of the demands they had made to the government, the promises the government had made, the aborted starts of projects and concluded that until a serious political move was taken by the people, the government won't take them serious. He concluded that it was not sufficient to promise to vote the opposition. It was necessary to consolidate the pledge with an oath. Any West Bassiland person who votes the ruling party shall be fined an animal without fur. And that should be the base of the oath each chief shall take on behalf of his people.

The pot containing the oath potion was brought and placed before the chiefs.

“Chief, let me say something before we go on with oath-taking. I can't encourage what I condemn. I condemn oath-taking because it imprisons the basic element of freedom – conscience. I believe two things have brought us here. The first is how to fight against the evil that is being implanted in our midst – the evil of luring the population into getting addicted to drinking. And the second is, making sure the results of the oncoming elections reflect the way people had voted. We should banish the evil of alcoholism. We should save our children, our young men and women from alcoholism. The consequences of alcoholism are beyond words. So, we must condemn the H/M's ploy to make our people drunks. Secondly, I don't think oath-taking is the most important aspect of this situation. People should be allowed to vote freely. What we should guard against is the

malpractices that have characterized previous elections – intimidation, bribery and vote rigging. If there is no rigging, if each person votes freely and results are proclaimed as people voted there would be no problem. The party in power does not win because people vote for it but because it has all the mechanisms to corrupt, intimidate and rig. Our resolve should therefore be to foil all attempts at those malpractices. I shall also like to say that we should listen to campaign speeches with critical minds. We should be able to distinguish between feasible promises and blatant lies. We have been victims of lies for years without end. Shall we continue to play into the hands of liars? Who among us has not been disappointed with vain election promises the ruling party makes? So, let's listen wisely and vote with the conviction that the path we have chosen will lead us to the *raison d'être* of elections," The Bad Samaritan advised.

"You are right Mr. BS. Elections should be transparent. So we shall put vanguards at all polling stations. In relation to addiction, we have noted with dismay how our young men and women especially those around the villages bordering Kole are gradually becoming addicted. We have to put an end to that," chief Ebwe said emphatically.

"Chiefs, I am grateful that this meeting has been well attended. We have dwelled on the truth. There is a big difference between self-interest and collective-interest. We should seek collective-interest first. I am sorry that because of my overcharged programme, I have been unable to prepare good entertainment for you. There is little food and a few bottles of beer for us to share. I have also brought a token meeting allowance for each of you. I call it a token, and I expect each and every one of us to take it in good faith. To get to the Promised Land, we have to time and again sacrifice. Tomorrow, I shall leave for Lebmot to go and launch the campaign proper there. I shall leave you behind with the belief that each of you will be conscious of the stakes at hand. Good luck," The Bad Samaritan ended the meeting.

Chapter Thirty One

The H/M heard about the meeting The BS held with the chiefs. He heard about the poor entertainment they got. He heard that some chiefs had regretted attending the meeting and had said openly that if The BS's politics was a politics of moralization, he should enter the priesthood. With that, he knew The BS's position was weak. So, three days after the meeting, he sent envoys to all the chiefs of West Bassiland inviting them to a meeting to prepare for the inauguration of the office of the ruling party.

Most chiefs thought that was a test to their resolve to abandon the ruling party. As such, they boycotted the meeting but sent low level representatives. The H/M felt extremely disappointed. In opening the meeting he blamed the chiefs for subjecting themselves to the manipulation of unproductive forces. "In politics people are never categorical about issues. People adjust themselves as things evolve. For example, if one's hen loses all its chicks to a kite, it doesn't mean that when it starts laying again its eggs should be thrown to the kite. His Excellency, the Honourable Ndolotane himself will come to inaugurate the office. So, whatever questions or grievances our people have against him, they will have the opportunity of expressing themselves to him. I believe it is imperative for the people of West Bassiland to receive him in pump and pageantry. Villages should organize dances, people should wear party uniform, and a day before the event, each village should send a team of women to Kole to help in the cooking. Cooking would be organized according to village groupings. There would

be five cows – one for the dignitaries, one for NW, one for NE, one for SW, and one for SE villages of West Bassiland. After the inauguration and departure of the dignitaries, there would be dance till day break.(TDB)”

The attendants carried home the message to their respective chiefs.

“*Amue*,” chief Nkume addressed chief Ntongwe who was paying him a visit . “The ways of politics are like spittle in the mouth; even if one does not intend to swallow it, circumstances force one to. I would not have liked to attend the inauguration the H/M is inviting us to but I have an interest there. The other day, Ngwene told us that the H/M intends to move the Head Quarters of West Bassiland to Kole. I want to hear whether that is what he and the incumbent are calling us for. I want to hear it from the horse’s own mouth.”

“I believe it is necessary for us to attend the inauguration. To fight an enemy effectively, we must know his tactics,” chief Ntongwe responded.

Although the chiefs did not meet to discuss their reaction to the inauguration, each decided to attend. So, all of them were there and some of them saw The Western for the first time.

The Honourable Ndolontane and his entourage arrived on time. The M.C. introduced the occasion and led in singing the National Anthem. Then he asked the H/M to make a welcome speech.

“Your Excellency, the Honourable MP for Pekuguba Division,

The Sub-Divisional Officers of Lebmot and Tonye,
The Lord Mayors of Lebmot and Tonye,
Your Royal Highnesses the chiefs of West Bassiland,
Religious Authorities,
Illustrious sons and Daughters of West Bassiland,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me singular pleasure to welcome you all to this our beautiful and peaceful land West Bassiland. I pray to the All Mighty God who brought you here safely for this occasion, to take you back safely after the celebrations.

Today is a new dawn for West Bassiland. West Bassiland is joining the bandwagon of our great and powerful political party. West Bassiland today presents her symbol of unalloyed loyalty to the national party, and in all humility and respect, asks His Excellency, The Honourable MP for Pekuguba Division, to inaugurate it himself. Your Excellency, all protocol respected, West Bassiland has always remained loyal to our great party. Unfortunately she lacked a concrete structure that could proclaim her unflinching loyalty to the party. We all know a structure was not necessary in the days past when there was no adulterating indoctrination, that is, when the West Bassiland man was one man. But today, in spite of the wonderful achievements of our great party, in spite of the peace and tranquillity our people in particular and the people of Pekuguba Division in general enjoy, uncouth and ambitious war mongering politicians are prowling this lovely land to destroy our hard won peace and tranquillity. The economic growth of this area has been unprecedented ever since our illustrious Head of State took over power. I should not be the one to enumerate the achievements of this government. Our Honourable MP is here himself. He will tell you what the government is doing for you to have the full slice of your national cake.

Once more, I warmly welcome you to this beautiful, peaceful and lovely land.

Long live our Head of State,
Long live the hard working people of West Bassiland,
Long live Ewawa.”

The H/M got a standing ovation for the speech after which the MC gave the floor to the Honourable MP.

“The Sub-Divisional Officers for Lembot and Tonye,

The Mayors of Lebmot and Tonye,
Your Royal Highnesses, the chiefs of West Bassiland,
Religious bodies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
'O happy day!' the MP intoned.

The ceremonial grounds echoed with raised hands in song and dance.

'O happy day,'

'When Jesus was born!'

'When Jesus was born...' the song and dance went on and on. The Honourable MP raised his hands several times for the elated audience to stop. After several attempts, the audience finally kept quiet.

"What a happy day, when we are all born! We are all born today. We are all born today because we can now manifest our unalloyed loyalty to our great and powerful party. We now have an edifice, a symbol of unity, might and power, a symbol of our resolve to weather all the evil machinations of the opposition. I must congratulate the H/M and all the people of goodwill who have contributed their quota in one way or the other for the realization of this project. May I express my sincere thanks for the honour I have been given to come and inaugurate it. I shall be inaugurating it as a representative of our illustrious Chairman of the party, and his loyal Servant, His Excellency, The Minister of Jungletry.

It is five years since I last came here, that is since the last elections. I have heard all nauseating things our distracters have said against me, the Minister and our government. I call that child's play – immature politics. I couldn't come here empty handed. I had to come with something tangible. Even H.E. the Minister could not come here when he had nothing to show as proof and appreciation for your confidence in the government he serves. Today, we have something to show. I have come that we share in the joy of having our share of the national cake."

“Woooooooooooooooooooooooooooo,” the ceremonial grounds echoed in jubilant shouts.

“Shortly after the last elections, I plunged myself into lobbying for development projects for this area. You would remember that during the campaigns, I promised that I was going to improve on the road infrastructure of this area, build health institutions, two secondary schools and a veritable market for your produce. After the landslide victory of our party, I left for Dande. Upon arrival, His Excellency the Minister helped me see some of his colleagues. All our attempts to coax them to give special attention to this area and carry out specific development projects failed because they argued that development funds were provided for Divisions and Sub-Divisions and not enclaves of Sub-Divisions. They said this area is part of Lebmot Sub-Division. So, H.E. the Minister advised me to table a motion for the creation of a Sub-Division in this area in the National Assembly. He reasoned that if this area achieved that status it would automatically have funds for good road infrastructure, Sub-Divisional hospital, Secondary Schools and a veritable market. Today, I have brought the good news that the National Assembly has already voted in favour of creating West Bassiland as the 4th Sub-Division in Pekuguba Division. The Bill is awaiting the return of the President from France. Once he returns and signs, you will have your Sub-Division and I can then quit politics.”

“Woo, *Abelobo nsooo! O nso, O nso nso o,*” the standing ovation and ululations echoed through the ceremonial grounds.

“I am confident that we are on a good footing. We are on a good footing. We are on a good footing because once the President signs the Bill creating West Bassiland Sub-Division, your subsequent MPs will have no reason going to prostrate in front of Ministers for development projects. There will be development budgets for West Bassiland. West Bassiland

would automatically have her own representative in Parliament, Sub-Divisional Office, Sub-Divisional Gendarmerie, Sub-Divisional Police, Sub-Divisional Military, Sub-Divisional Hospital, Sub-Divisional Secondary School and Sub-Divisional Treasury. Each Ministry would have a Sub-Divisional Directorate or Delegation to cater for its interests here. Once that happens, those of you who would have money to build houses will make real money from rents. Houses and food would be in high demand because there would be an influx of civil servants and business people. So, brighter days are ahead. Let no one deceive you with empty words. You are getting to the end of the tunnel. Your redemption is in the ruling party. Only our party can provide development to a community like yours. Once our illustrious Head of State returns, you will see.

I am now going to inaugurate the office of our great party. And let me tell you, this inauguration is the prelude of greater inaugurations in West Bassiland. So, I think, West Bassilanders should gird their loins to receive inaugurating dignitaries greater than those of us here today.

In the name of the National Chairman of our National party, His Excellency Comrade Saul Kilcam I cut the ribbon and declare this office open.”

“Woooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo...” shouts of jubilation deafened the attendants.

After the cutting of the ribbon, the MC asked the chief of Kole to grace the occasion with a short evaluative speech and song.

“I am the chief of Kole. I make speeches when Kole village meets. When the whole of West Bassiland meets, the chief of Nidong speaks on our behalf. So, give him his prerogatives.”

“Thank you for that correction. Can the chief of Nidong then thank his guests on behalf of West Bassiland? Chief, the floor is yours.”

Chief Nkume was taken aback. He had not expected the honour given him because of what Ngwene had told them. Ngwene had said that the H/M wanted to move the Headquarters status of Nidong to Kole. If that were the case, the chief of Kole would not keep to the status quo. Chief Nkume got up rather confused and addressed the assembly.

“Your Excellency, the MP for Pekuguba Division,
The Sub-Divisional officers of Lebmot and Tonye,
All protocol respected,

I am flabbergasted by the honour and confidence the chief of Kole has once more bestowed on me by asking me to speak on behalf of the people of West Bassiland. On behalf of the people of West Bassiland, I welcome all the dignitaries and all the guests who have come here to grace this occasion with their presence. May God All Mighty who brought them here safely take them back home safely. When His Excellency began his speech, he sang, ‘O happy day’. Who among us would sing the contrary? Who would say what we have heard is not good news? Who would say that what the great national party has in stock for us is not what we desire? Can we therefore abort a pregnancy in place because we think a new wife will conceive? I believe West Bassiland should support His Excellency the MP and give him what it takes to achieve his objectives. More grease to his elbows.

Long live our dear fatherland.”

‘Woooooooooooo,’ the attendants shouted their appreciation of the chief’s short speech.

After the speech, the MC indicated where each group would be entertained. But before that, the chiefs were asked to meet at the newly inaugurated office. Each chief was given FCFA 50,000 and chief Nkume FCFA 75,000. The chiefs and their villagers then moved to their respective entertainment houses. Food and drinks were in abundance.

After the dignitaries had eaten and drunk, they left. The natives of West Bassiland then took over. All night long, they drank, ate and danced praising the H/M and the Ewawa Party for Advanced Democracy (EPAD).

Chapter Thirty Two

The young men and women of West Bassiland danced themselves out all night long. At dawn, they started staggering home. Ngwene left earlier and faster. When he got to the hill where The BS's vehicle was burnt he stopped, cut branches of trees and made a barrier to stop all the children who came around Nidong and beyond. When most of them came he asked them what they thought about the inauguration.

"I believe it was wonderful. Honourable Ndolotane is a great man," one responded.

"The H/M has shown people that he is a no nonsense man. Man-pass-man" another answered.

"Now listen to me. You went to the inauguration to eat and drink. I went with another purpose. The whole day yesterday, I did not eat because of what I saw and what I predict would happen in West Bassiland. Do you know that we are gradually ceding the Headquarter status of West Bassiland to Kole village? Kole village has become the pivotal centre of events in West Bassiland. How many times have we been asked to move down to Kole village to inaugurate events? Events that usually took place in Nidong now take place in Kole. Now, listen, if we don't act quickly before the elections, all election material in the chief's house at Nidong would be moved to Kole and that will be the end. When the ruling party wins, as it will surely win, they will simply declare Kole the capital of the new Sub-Division. So, as we return, we should meet the chief of Nidong and tell him that we want him to dissolve all the cells of the

SPRP and convert them into those of the ruling party. This should be done without delay. We should all become members of the ruling party. We should have nothing to do with the SPDP. As I am saying, radio and television must carry the news that we have denounced The Bad Samaritan once and for good.”

“*A mue*, you have reasoned like me. The BS is just trying to woo us for his interest. We shall lose if we follow him,” Belle said.

“I don’t think our chief would refuse our suggestion. I liked his speech because he said we should all give the Hon. MP our support,” Esambe complemented.”

The young men and women moved straight to the chief’s house and told him their mind.

“Chief,” their spokesperson addressed the chief. “Politics is self-interest. We have noted with great concern that for some time now, events that usually took place here now take place at Kole. This means that we are gradually ceding the Headquarter status of this village to Kole. We believe that if that continues, we may find ourselves being asked to carry the electoral material in your house to Kole. For us to maintain the Headquarter status of this village, we must toe the line set by the ruling party. We don’t think The BS has more in stock for us than His Excellency has promised. So, we pray you not to have any dealings with The BS anymore.”

“Have you thought things out well? Are you sure you are not being influenced by unattainable promises?” the chief asked.

“We have thought things out very well. We know the MP has always told us lies. But this time he has sounded more credible.”

The chief took a long breath and told the young people he would convene a council meeting to discuss their worry. The meeting did not take long. The Nidong village council

resolved that from then on, The Bad Samaritan was barred from all political manifestations in the village and beyond. Militancy in his party was also banned. Nidong and all West Bassiland were 100% loyal to the party in power.

One of The BS's workers in Nidong was told to inform his master of the council decision. He left at once for Tonye. The BS had returned from a very successful campaign tour of Lebmot north, east and south and was preparing to go to West Bassiland after a two day rest. The worker narrated the story to him and warned him of possible violence if he did not abide by the people's decision. The BS could not believe his worker.

"Go back and tell the chief that I have just returned from a very successful tour of other parts of our Sub-Division. We have every hope of winning. Tell the chief and his people that I shall be there in two days time."

So, in two days, The BS set off for West Bassiland. He did not stop at Kole. He wanted to start with Nidong. After Nekom, he got to a barrier with a placard carrying the inscription, "No way for The Bad Samaritan. What is Bad can't be Good. We don't want Bad Samaritans in Nidong.

He removed the placard and continued. A few metres from the placard he met two large logs of wood placed across the road. He and his driver pushed them aside and continued. A few metres from the first logs, they saw three large logs that required twenty people to push them away. That brought home the lesson. The Bad Samaritan shivered from anger and asked his driver to reverse and return. When they got to Kole, he stopped at the once famous bar to chat with the barman before going to see the chief. The barman told him of the inauguration of the office of the ruling party, the revelations His Excellency the Honourable MP made to the people and how the prospects for a Sub-Division have overjoyed the people and how they had resolved to support no other political party but the ruling party in the oncoming elections.

“Bullshit, stupid. Those fellows have once more been clobbered. Nonsense! How can they believe in such lies? How many times has the MP told them such lies? Can a government that cannot maintain structures in place create new ones? Why on earth have these fellows drunk stupidity with cooking spoons? People lick stupidity with index fingers but the people of West Bassiland have used cooking spoons in drinking theirs. Can you send somebody to call the chief for me?”

“I can’t. I am an outcast in this village because I told the people that the MP was lying to them. They have completely boycotted my bar.”

The BS stood up suddenly apparently in anger to go and see the chief. He wobbled and stopped abruptly. Dark clouds hovered in his eyes. He slumped to the ground. His driver and the barman rushed to help him. That drew a small crowd. The driver asked the people to help put him in the vehicle. None came forth. As he and the barman tried to carry him one non-native came in to help them. Apparently without reason, one native punched the non-native hard on the belly. The non-native screamed and retaliated with a powerful solid blow to the temple that sent the native sprawling helplessly to the floor. He fell face up and went limp with eyes open like those of an epileptic. The crowd yelled in fright and that drew a larger crowd. In the cacophony that followed, The BS opened his eyes and stared vaguely at the crowd. Presently, there were shouts of help, help coming around The Western.

“Unbelievable! Unbelievable!” The population shouted as they rushed to put out the fire that was fast consuming the front of The Western. A thousand buckets of water came from all over the place and within a short time the blaze was put under control.

The driver sensed danger and drove off at top speed with The BS. After the banging, bashing and rocking they got to Tonye.

“Should I continue to Tumba hospital?” the driver asked.

“No, I am OK. But tell me, what happened in Kole?”

“I think you were overwhelmed by events. I think what you saw and heard was too much for you to bear. The barman and I saw you slump to the floor. We rushed to help you. As we tried to carry you into the vehicle, the natives attacked us. So when we put you in the vehicle, I drove off with you.”

“They did not want you to carry me into the vehicle? What was their reason for attacking you?”

“I don’t know. They attacked the non-native who tried to help us carry you into the vehicle. It may be they did not want anybody to help us carry you into the vehicle.”

“What about the chief? He did not come around?”

“No. He did not.”

“I think my long absence there has played foul on my relation with the people. I just need to rekindle our friendship.”

“It can’t be that simple. There is more to it. Can you imagine that people with whom you ate and drank yesterday threw stones at your vehicle as I drove off with you? Judge the situation even from the language of the placards. I think the old wound syndrome has been rekindled in them.”

“All would be over once we re-establish contact with the chiefs. We are tired now. Go, we shall discuss a strategy tomorrow.”

“I shall be unable to come to work tomorrow. My palms are sore, my waist is throbbing with pain and I am hopelessly exhausted.”

“OK, I need a long rest myself.”

Chapter Thirty Three

After a two day rest, the driver came to work. He did the necessary checks on the vehicle – oil, water, break and clutch fluid. Then he washed the vehicle and after that, went to see his master. He greeted him rather reservedly. The BS sensed it and asked why.

“Sir, if I were you, I would abandon politics, – politics of reformation, politics of righteousness, politics aimed at correcting the ills of the world. It does not pay. What are you trying to reform – the callousness of the human race? Ever since I took over from Beri, I have observed with great concern that you throw your money away for a useless course. You have spent more than thirty million francs trying to please people. If you had invested all that money into this business and created good working relations with the powers that be in this locality – the law enforcement officers, the Tax Department and the SDO, the business would have been bustling. You waste money on vehicles running political errands. Political errands bring no dividend to you. If your vehicles were evacuating produce from West Bassiland hinterland, your stores would not only have been full, you would have been realizing hard cash. But the political errands the vehicles do yield nothing. You have given so much advanced purchase money to customers. Now they don’t want to see you. They want you dead in order to dishonour the pledges. If we are not lucky, we may find it difficult to recuperate what we have given out. So, let’s abandon politics and do our business.”

“You sound like Beri. If the fellows prove dishonest, we shall take them to court.”

“Court in this country! Is there any institution that is as frustrating as the court in Ewawa? Haven’t you had a court experience in this country? Sir, if a snake of injustice is pursuing you, don’t seek refuge in our court premises. Courts give verdict on the basis of who bribes them more, and not on who is aggrieved. Take one of those fellows to court and when he spends twice what he owes you in bribing court personnel, the court will give him twenty years to repay what he owes you. The criminal is better protected in this country than the honest citizen.”

“I still believe in the virtues of this country and I must work to reinstitute them.”

“I would have recommended the seminary for you then. Unfortunately even seminaries in Ewawa are as devoid of virtue as other institutions are.”

“Whether or not, I feel the urge and I am determined to succeed.”

“That may be at the expense of your wealth and health. I have never seen where an advocate of collective interest has won. Advocates of collective interest have always been disappointed by the people for whom they fight. Revolutions of collective interest have always failed. Communism has failed. Socialism is failing. The church is failing”

“And so you think I shall also fail?”

“You have already failed because the people for whom you have sacrificed your services and money stoned your corpse, so to speak. A person who suddenly drops unconscious is a corpse.”

As the driver and The BS conversed, two constables entered and said The BS was wanted at the police station. Thinking the invitation was related to the oncoming elections he got up and asked Ngwa, to drive them to the police station. At the station he saw two wraith-like figures sitting in chains on a bench. Their bodies were tattooed with welts apparently inflicted by indiscriminate and brutal

use of truncheons. Close by was the police officer with whom he had had a brawl over ten thousands francs the officer had stolen from his car documents. He eyed the fellow with stabbing scorn, then turned his attention once more on the two chained fellows. He recognized them as the barman and the non-native from Kole. Why were they there that early morning? Why were they beaten almost to death? While these questions raced in his mind, one of the constables who had come for him invited him into the office and asked him to strip to bare pants.

“Why,” he asked.

“Because you are under arrest.”

“Under arrest? Why? Do you know to whom you are talking?”

“If instead of obeying peacefully you are questioning and becoming intransigent, I shall call the forces to do it for you violently.”

“You better call the forces,” The BS said pouting and raising his nose in defiance.

The officer of the FCFA 10,000 overheard the exchange of words and moved close by. He eyed The BS menacingly, breathed heavily and moved closer to him. The BS returned the eying with a contemptuous grimace. For a long minute they traded venomous glances at each other. Before the officer took advantage of his position, the commissioner came and invited The BS to his office.

“Sit down Professor,” he said while hanging his jacket on a peg. “I have come to work this early to make sure the boys don’t manhandle you as is usually the case with a situation like yours. I received a radio message from hierarchy to arrest you for inciting violence at Kole three or four days ago. I wonder why a man of your calibre should indulge in scandals and acts of violence especially at this sensitive period. The government is doing everything to rid this period of tension and violence because of the oncoming elections.

For elections to be free and fair, there must be an atmosphere of calm and mutual trust. Both the government and the opposition must work toward that. But you would remember that a few months ago, you caused a scandal here which caused the demotion of two of our officers. You accused them of stealing ten thousand francs from your car documents. Your election campaign speeches are lethal. To you, the government in place has never done anything good. Such vile talks, such incendiary speeches incite the population to violence. These are facts you can't deny because I and most other officers of this area are living witnesses. You are engaged in clandestine business, in covert politics and slander. I have as such, been asked to lock you and your collaborators up. In a rural police station like this, there is only one cell for every Dick and Harry. We use its sad conditions as a deterrent. But I don't think that would be ideal for you. That is why I have come to make special arrangements for you. I want you treated in a more dignified way on condition that you collaborate fully with us. So, I shall give you the privilege of returning to your house every evening at 8.30 p.m. to pass the night and returning to this station at 5.30 a.m. every morning to pass the day in the courtyard. In other words, you will be having good sleep every night at home and enjoying the fresh air of this compound in the day. This would be done on condition that, you shall avoid contact with the public, with the media and most of all you shall avoid venturing out of 'Tonye.'

"Mr. Commissioner, can I say something?"

"If I had wanted a discussion with you, I would have asked you questions. I was given instructions. I am giving you instructions."

"My Commissioner, instructions to quarantine me? Isn't this worse than a death sentence?"

"Professor, your fate is in your hands. Don't abuse my generosity. If I were you I would go and sit where the other two criminals who have just been moved into the cell had

sat and avoid contact with people coming into the station. Else, you would be subjected to the grim realities of our cell,” the Commissioner said, rang the bell and a constable came in and conducted The BS out of the office.

Esole-The Professor-The Bad Samaritan-The BS sat down on the bench and gradually slipped into a deep reverie. The world became one lump of darkness. There was no past, no present, no future. He had been forbidden from having contact with people. What people? People did not exist. Time did not exist. Space did not exist. Only a blank, nondescript emptiness – what?

At 8.30 p.m. Ngwa came along to carry him home.

“Sir, it is time for you to go and sleep. This is the time they say you can return to your house. Let’s go.”

The BS did not shake. Ngwa noticed he had not changed position ever since he left him there in the late afternoon. Was he in a state of shock? Was he sleeping awake? His eyes were open giving the blank stare of a dead fish. His breathing was low, very low. Was something wrong with him? After pondering over what to do, he took courage and held him. He shook him violently to revive him. There was a mild stir, then signs of gradual recovery from a deep reverie. The BS stretched himself and attempted to stand up. Ngwa took advantage of that and helped him up then took him to the vehicle. When they got home, they met Mukete waiting rather tensed. He had waited for too long and wanted to hurry home. He whispered to Ngwa the sad news that tax controllers from Tumba came in the afternoon, presented a default tax bill of FCFA 55,000,000 and sealed Eso & Sons Enterprises when they were told The BS was at the police station.

“Let’s keep the bad news till tomorrow. He has gone through a terrible trauma today. If we tell him anything bad now, he may collapse again,” Ngwa advised.

“OK. Tell him his food is on the table. If he eats and we tidy up the place, I shall return.”

“You’ll better do that alone. I have had enough hell with him the whole day. I have to return early and have a little sleep before I come back at 5.00 a.m. to take him back to the police station. He has to be there at 5.30 a.m.” Ngwa said and left.

Mukete waited impatiently for The BS to show signs of wanting food. At last, he called him and asked him to go for a small Guinness from the bar.

“Tax controllers from Tumba sealed the business this afternoon and left a default bill of FCFA 55,000,000. They say you have been operating your business illegally.”

“I have now got the message. Those uncircumcised blockheads and their government want to strangle me and render me incapable of carrying out the campaign effectively. But I am going to show them that my learning is not in vain. Tomorrow, you will go to Tumba. Get a small Guinness for me anywhere else.”

Mukete soon returned with the Guinness. He opened it and served The BS.

“Go, and come early, before I go to the police station. You will leave early to post letters for me in Tumba.”

Mukete and Ngwa met at the gate early in the morning and woke up The BS who was oversleeping because he had spent the whole night writing letters. He wrote to the Governor of the SW Province, the Minister of Territorial Administration, the Secretary General of the UN and the ‘Front News’ newspaper.

The newspaper published on its front page The BS’s predicaments and other prevalent electoral malpractices in Ewawa. Thus before the Governor and the Minister got their letters, they were aware of what was happening in Tonye. Fearing foreign media and election observers would capitalize on that, the Governor took prompt action and ordered that The BS be liberated with immediate effect, his business reopened and be allowed to go on with his election campaign unmolested.

Chapter Thirty Four

The BS went wild with joy when he regained his constitutional rights. Before he re-launched his election campaign, he went in for a very serious novena prayer session, a seven day punishing dry fast in which he prayed to God to remove from the eyes of the electorates, the cataract the devil of the sects that ruled the country had implanted; to remove from the ears of the electorates the evil frequency that appreciates only falsehood and implant in its place, one that appreciates the truth; to implant in the brains of the electorates the ability to distinguish day and night, sky and earth, fire and water etc. as He Himself had distinguished in the course of creation. He prayed that during the elections, the electorate should be the carrier of the ballot paper but the guardian angel behind them should be the actual voter.

Now full of confidence that divine intervention would neutralize the forces of sects in the country, The BS set a date for the launching of his campaign. He chose central Nidong. Canopies were set and militants prepared routes for the procession. But before he set off for Nidong a curfew was imposed. It was said that two reverend sisters had been murdered in Tumba and their assassins were being pursued. The launching was thus postponed for a week. A week later, The BS successfully launched his campaign. In spite of the tension following the slaying of the reverend sisters, the launch was heavily attended. The media had made of The BS a martyr. And with that, even his enemies were

sympathetic to him. His popularity rose, his party started regaining lost grounds. Even Ngwa and Mukete were impressed with the progress and encouraged him. Now full of himself, he planned an impressive come-back at Kole. He told Ngwa to fill two vehicles with gifts and get ready to move to Kole. Ngwa, now very enthusiastic did as his master commanded. The evening before the day they were to set off, a vehicle carrying West Bassiland people from Tumba overturned in a stream killing nineteen people. The whole of West Bassiland was in mourning. Such happenings made The BS devise other ways of campaigning to catch up with lost time. He bought the front pages of all papers sympathetic to his course. And while waiting for the grief to subside, he sent envoys to villages of interest to prepare ground for his coming,

In Bassiland road accidents are considered deaths by violence and so they require purification rites. These take a long time and much money to perform. As The BS waited for the rites to be performed before going in for full campaign in West Bassiland, there were rumours of several murders, road and railway accidents all over the country. It was said that fires consumed buildings at will, roasting to death innocent children. Ewawans were helpless in grief. A dark cloud had descended on the country. The Catholic Church lost seven reverend sisters, four priests and a Bishop in gruesome murders. Landslides killed several people in Dande. In Tuala, a ship capsized killing 123 people. The party in power showed the public face of losing interest in campaigning for elections while the nation mourned. It declared weeks of mourning. Several weeks later, things stabilized and campaigns started.

The BS campaigned hard, really hard. He moved out to the people. He raised his hands to them and called them comrades in suffering. He declared:

“Vote for me all of you that are enclaved and I shall disenclave you; Vote for me all of you that are over taxed and I shall reduce your taxes; Vote for me all you whose loved ones have fled the country because of unemployment and I shall console you by creating jobs for your other children; Vote for me all of you that are heavily burdened and I shall carry your yokes for you; Vote for me all of you that need redemption and I shall redeem you.”

The BS carried his message from door to door. It was powerful and convincing. He said emphatically that his reaction to the two patients was a practical lesson to the electorates who, because of an on-the-spot bottle of beer, vote with no thought of the long term consequences. The population understood him. The electorates saw with him. Women bore witness that if able-bodied people could not withstand vehicle transportation in the area because of the state of the roads, patients could not.

But then, elections came and the ruling party won with a landslide. Results proved that the natives had had more confidence in what the Honourable MP had promised them than what The BS had told them. Results showed that the natives held to the adage that it was better to deal with the devil one knew than with the angel one did not know. Results tended to say, when the people needed help from The BS, he refused to help them.

Two days later, the President returned from a three months leave in France. At the airport briefing, he hinted that for Ewawa to develop appreciably there was an urgent need to restructure the existing administrative units. With that briefing the people of West Bassiland went wild with jubilation. Those who hadn't portable radios bought. They carried them to their farms, to the streams, wherever they went, expecting the good news that West Bassiland was made an administrative unit. Every evening, men women and children gathered at The Western, drinking in silence and

listening to the radio. After one week, the national radio announced that the Head of State would speak to the nation on Friday evening. Although the time was 7.30 p.m., the people of West Bassiland returned from their farms at 4.00 p.m. and got ready for the news.

At 7.30 prompt, the President addressed his nation.

“Ewawians, Ewawianers, it is with singular pleasure that I acknowledge your political maturity. You have demonstrated once more the unflinching loyalty and confidence you have in me and the party of progress I have the honour to be chairman. By your massive vote, by that overwhelming and landslide victory you have conferred on my leadership, I wish to thank you most sincerely. I believe you have given the *coup de grace* to our political distracters. All is well that ends well. Those who sow seeds of hate and disunity, those who do politics by slandering their opponents must learn the rules of the game...

I have returned with a two point agenda. All those accused of embezzling public funds will face the full force of the axe of justice...

For this beautiful fatherland to develop appreciably, we have to restructure its administrative units. This is not a matter of public debate. From now on, what used to be referred to as **Province** will be referred to as **Region**, the Regional Head Quarters will remain the same and the officer in chief in charge of the Region shall maintain the name of Governor with the same prerogatives and amenities as the Governor of the defunct structure. This goes well with other structures. What used to be referred to as Division will be referred to as **Territory**. What used to be known as Sub-Division will be referred to as **Sub-Territory**.

These modifications are necessary for the enhancement, efficacy and control of decentralization...

Long live our dear fatherland.

“*Amue!*” Nzeme exclaimed. “West Bassiland has not been mentioned. Nothing has changed. We are still part of Lebmot.”

“Do you think the Head of State would have read all the minor changes in one speech? Let’s wait when anchormen will start analyzing the speech,” Ngwene advised as the people sighed and dispersed in silence.

Very soon, anchormen and newspapers started analyzing the Head of State’s speech saying what he said and what he did not say, what he intended to say and how he would have said it, the beauty of his language, his composure, the marvellous mannerisms and so on. They hailed his wisdom and likened him to Abraham Lincoln.

Such trash worked on The BS’s psyche. He lost interest in life. He wondered why God who created the world and distinguished good from evil, water from land, sky from earth, could not make Ewawans distinguish between truth and falsehood in politics. He wondered why people who have had the misfortune of being ruled by a heartless and brutal kleptomaniac administration for twenty five years could not distinguish their right from their left. He wondered what one should call politics – the *art* of life or the *science* of life? He wondered the forces that influenced elections in Ewawa. Were they the embellished lies of the party in power; the conceitedness of the electorate; the overwhelming financial and logistical power of the party in power; the power of sects as characterized by bloodletting – the numerous man-made and natural catastrophes that wreak havoc on the country before elections? If so, would a plain-truth-bearing, poverty-stricken, logistically handicap and God fearing opposition candidate ever hope for success? These Questions made him sick.

He remembered succinctly his daughter’s experience in Dande – an experience that led to her returning to Britain and getting married perhaps as a better alternative or last

resort to a white; his wife's migration to Britain to do meagre jobs; his loss of FCFA 5,000,000 to the private secretary of the Director of Salaries; his loss of FCFA 5,000,000 to the SDO, the Commissioner of police and the Director of taxes; the loss of the two elections, and finally, the origin of the name, The Bad Samaritan – a name that stuck on him like a blotch for the worse. He could not understand why the emotional overtone of his refusal to carry avowed corpses to hospital had blunted reasoning to the point that even the foreign media could not lay blame on the state of roads in Ewawa.

The more he put himself to the task of reasoning out things, the more he became confused. The very people accused of patronizing sects are prominent church elders in their respective denominations, are the main stay of the churches: in church donations, decision-making, communion-taking and all round sponsorship. They rule the churches as they rule the country. And when things get tough with the country, they invite the Pope. Where would one therefore draw the line between church and sect, righteousness and sin? The BS was flabbergasted and thought that perhaps if Beri were around he would know the answer.

An eerie sensation numbed his spine when he juxtaposed the *raison d'être* of the President's restructuring of administrative units with the praises anchormen lavished on him. He made a bird's eye view of the promises the MP had made to the people of West Bassiland – promises which in fact, made him lose favour in the area. He recalled how he had warned the people against unattainable promises desperate candidates make during election campaigns. He shook his head and as he was about slipping into melancholy, the boy the chief of Kole had sent to invite him to launch his party at Kole, came and told him that the whole of West Bassiland was in mourning. The people were devastated and

dispirited by the disappointment they got from the President's speech. Some were swearing that if they saw the MP, they will tear him to pieces.

"The whole place is in chaos," the boy went on. "Angers flare up intermittently between husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister, friend and friend etc. whenever one tries to reason out who was right or wrong during the election campaign. Things came to a head when the barman and the non-native returned from police custody and the native apologized that he hit the non-native because the non-native stepped on his hurt toe when the non-native rushed to carry The BS into the vehicle. The rumour that had led to the beating and arrest of the barman and the non-native was that The BS had incited the barman to set fire to The Western and the non-native to beat up the native for abandoning the Serious People's Redemption Party. That rumour caused very serious inter-quarters squabbles. Furthermore people are fast unearthing the sources and aim of The Western and are planning to erase the building to the ground if the truth outs. Some openly apologize for having dishonoured you. In fact, the chiefs intend to send a delegation to you. Our people say, 'It is an ill omen for a lame person to encounter soldier ants while climbing or descending a hill.' I am a lame man. I have no father. That is why I am fleeing from West Bassiland. Most people are fleeing. West Bassiland can explode at any time."

"Yes, it serves us right. As I go licking my wounds, so shall they go licking theirs. Ours is Ewawa in miniature. Each person drinks the vile broth of his imbecility."

"The story is a scathing indictment of antidemocratic and terribly corrupt practices by rulers against their own suffering masses."

Bole Butake, Professor of Theatre Arts, Critic and Playwright, University of Yaoundé I, Cameroon

"The Bad Samaritan is a testament that Alobwed'Epie is a writer of extraordinary gifts. The novel is a realistic social fiction that depicts the realities of the Ewawa nation, a microcosm of many African Post Independence nations. Esole the protagonist – a onetime professor turned politician – refuses to join the debauchery of political elites and declines to compromise on his principles of what is right. The challenges to his uprightness are overwhelming, but his example is edifying to the agonising victims of the deaf and brutal system in place."

**Sarah Anyang Agbor, Senior Lecturer of Literature,
University of Yaounde I, Cameroon**

The Bad Samaritan is set in a kleptomaniac and highly corrupt imaginary African country called Ewawa. Due to mismanagement, financial institutions collapse. Salaries are slashed and there is unprecedented unemployment leading to country exodus. Professor Esole and his wife are not only aggrieved by the salary slashes, but also by the dubious closure of the Post Office Savings Bank with their savings. Desperate for money, they resort to borrowing from private sources at exorbitant interest rates. Esole toddles into politics with the aim of righting things. Will his naïve approach to politics make or mar?

Alobwed'Epie, author of *The Death Certificate*, *The Lady with a Beard*, and *The Day God Blinked*, was born at Ngomboku in Kupe-Muanenguba Division, South-West Region, Cameroon. He studied at the Universities of Yaoundé and Leeds, and teaches Creative Writing at the University of Yaoundé 1 Cameroon.

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